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SIR GUY D'ESTERRE.



SIR GUY D'ESTERRE.

BY

SELINA BUNBURY,

AUTHOR OF "COOMBE ABBEY," "VISIT TO MY BIRTH-PLACE,"
"OUR OWN STORY," ETC. ETC.

"I pray you,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice."—SHAKESPEARE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

M R S. C U F F,

ONE OF THE FRIENDS LONG INTERESTED IN HER WORKS,

These Volumes

ARE DEDICATED,

WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF GRATEFUL RESPECT,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

SIR GUY D'ESTERRE.

CHAPTER I.

IN the gloomy turret-chamber of a strong tower, near to the coast, lay a wounded English knight, who, after having won his spurs by early and valiant service with the noble Sir Philip Sidney, and afterwards with the gallant Essex, was reduced to the sad mortification of having had not only his life endangered, but his good looks, for the time at least, very seriously damaged, by the rude stroke of an Irish club.

“Shade of the glorious Sidney,” thought Sir Guy, as he partly opened his heavy eyes for the first time after a state of total unconsciousness, and believed himself to have been left to die where he had fallen,

"is this to be the ignoble end of thy follower at Zutphen?"

With a low groan the young man re-closed his eyes, sensible only of pain, thirst, and uneasiness, without noticing the fact that he had been removed to a place of shelter.

Though his eyes were shut, and his senses in a very confused and dreamy state, that mental intelligence which mysteriously represents to us what the bodily vision does not behold, caused him to feel some fair vision had, without sound or visible movement, approached him. Perhaps, in truth, the heavy eyelids were not so absolutely closed as to prevent a little gleam of light from penetrating through the close, short fringe of the upper and lower lids, which, from its unusual thickness, rendered that partial opening less painful to himself, and unobservable to the beholder. However that might be, Sir Guy D'Esterre felt the soothing consciousness that some fair spiritual presence was around him—his guardian angel—with a face of pitying sweetness that gazed on him till irritation subsided, and pain itself was unfelt.

The natural consequence of this improved condition of the mental and bodily sensations was, that the wounded knight's thick eyelashes parted more distinctly; but when, in consequence of that movement, they afterwards rose altogether, and his eyes opened out with an expressiveness corresponding more to the state of his mental than his physical being, the vision had vanished; and though he shut them again, and strove to relapse into the semi-consciousness, the waking dreaminess, that had caused the apparition, no effort of his could reproduce it. The soothing dream and its good influences had ended as dreams do end, and actuality began to develop itself more fully to his senses.

An attempt to rise convinced him that his brain was sufficiently dizzy to induce all sorts of vain imaginations; and it also showed him that a wound on his head had been dressed, as well as another on his shoulder: he saw, too, that he was in a rude chamber; and that he had been removed from the spot where he fell by his party was the conclusion he was glad to arrive at,

though giddiness and pain made him sink back quickly on his rushy couch, and, again shutting his eyes with a heavy moan, resign himself to endurance.

This time our knight was not at all sensible that any presence, spiritual or otherwise, was around him,—the laws of mental affinities were not in action,—and it was only the motion of a very material hand moving at his head that caused him to start and stare in a manner that hurt himself, and terrified the fresh apparition he now beheld. The wave of a conjuror's wand might have effected such a transformation as he now beheld. Through half-closed eyelids he had seen, or fancied he saw, a lovely countenance, but with eyes of such surpassing beauty and sweetness as to absorb the gazer wholly. These eyes were near to him, bent upon him; seemed to look within the double fringe that fenced his own; and the face and eyes he thought might be a ministering angel's, if such were made visible to suffering humanity: there was so much innocence and wonderment, blent with the pity, the tenderness, and yet the high intelligence

with which the painter would depict such a being employed on its mission of love. Sir Guy could have sworn he actually saw those eyes of the deepest blue, and might have protested that, instead of the radiant locks usually ascribed to those heavenly ministrants, these eyes had deep black lashes, and that the fair, pale face was contrasted by the long black hair that fell in plaits at full length down the tall and somewhat stately figure.

“Do I rave?” he said now, as he stared with very different sensations at his second apparition, and marvelled if some concussion of his brain had been the cause of representing to him the first.

A broad, sun-tanned face, with flat features and yellowish hair, was projected almost as near to his as he fancied the other had been; the hair was turned up under huge folds of saffron-coloured linen; the short figure was draped in a frieze mantle, bordered with shaggy fringe, such a one as our favourite poet, Edmund Spenser, described as “a fit house for a thief, and for a bad housewife no less con-

venient" — the universal fashion of the wearer's country then, and one, the remains of which in its modified form, we are sorry to see giving place to the affectation of modern finery.

"Do I rave?" asked Sir Guy, looking up at the ugly face, "or did I really see her?"

The old woman shook her head.

"Old crone!" he muttered to himself, "how like a witch she looks!"

But he resigned himself to the intention she evidently had of dressing his wounds, feeling he was not yet able to converse; and, swallowing the draught she gave him, postponed all troublesome thoughts and exciting conjectures by falling asleep.

Singular to relate, on that same evening his first vision reappeared to him: he saw the same figure, and gazed on it with the same artfully screened eyes; the very same wonderfully beautiful ones drew near, and bent over him: they did not draw back, they even approached nearer, as if to scrutinize the nature of the gleam of light they saw through the seemingly closed lashes; but when Sir Guy's treacherously broke

bounds, and opened suddenly, they withdrew, and the slow dropping of the deep white lids was to him like the falling of a veil over the soul that had looked upon him.

The vivid glow that coloured a face naturally inclined to paleness rather than bloom, was a clear indication of the humanity of the beautiful apparition; nevertheless, it vanished ere a word or gesture from the wounded knight could woo it to stay or to speak.

The next day he awoke, feeling himself likely to live and do well, and awaited rather impatiently the approach of his attendant, or attendants, as the case might be. The yellow-headed Celt soon appeared; but there was no other vision that day. To all his inquiries she was mute; when he asked where he was, she shook her head; when he railed at herself, the yellow head-gear shook again.

"Tell me, was there not lately here a maiden of Spain, whose eyes are softer than those of her nation mostly are, and with a more wondrously changeful countenance, a face that converses in silence?"

The old woman again shook her head, looking at him fixedly the while.

"Hateful old crone ! tell me, I bid thee, how came I hither ? where am I, and with whom ?"

This time, in addition to the negative shake of her head, she held a finger in a cautionary manner pointed to the low-arched door.

Sir Guy rose on one arm with a gesture of anger, but the pain of a wounded head and side drew forth a moan, and he lay back again.

"Good mother," he said, after some time of silence, trying the effect of his softest tones of voice, "Good mother, I would know to what charitable Christian I am indebted for succour."

But the old woman, having now retired to her seat on the block, only replied by signals which, so far as the impatient knight could comprehend them, meant to express that he had better lie there and be quiet, making the best of a bad case.

Sir Guy groaned as he, of necessity, submitted to a philosophy but little congenial to his temperament.

After bestowing a malediction on the fate that had led him to accompany the rash and impulsive Earl of Essex, when, after his escape from the court of his love-sick maiden Queen, he had with equal precipitation left the army in France to hurry back to her, without waiting the return of the messenger he had sent to mollify her displeasure and obtain his leave of absence, and thus occasioned himself to be sent on service to Ireland, which, in common with others, he styled "the cursedest of all lands"—he began to seek in his own cogitations some solution of the questions he had vainly put to his attendant. He knew full well how his mischance had occurred, and it was with a sense of indignation, if not of shame, he recollected that he, who had earned his spurs in the Netherlands, who had served under Sidney, and been the comrade of Essex, must have owed his present state to the blow of an Irish club.

Condemned to service against what were called the Irish rebels, Sir Guy had been sent on the inglorious exploit of surprising a rude fortress of the chieftain O'More, a

place of resort in the mountains for his wild followers, who were mostly absent with their chief at the time of the assault. Some prisoners were taken, the fortress fired, and the cattle driven away with other plunder to the English camp.

Sir Guy, sorely misliking his duty, had got considerably in advance of his troop, and passed through an arched passage of rock, close to the sea-shore, by which their road lay, when the wild cries that denoted an onslaught of the natives fell on his startled ear. An ambushed band had risen from among the rocks, and fallen on the plunderers. As Sir Guy hastily turned to rejoin his troop, a figure, almost colossal in its size, stopped the passage he had just passed through.

It was habited in the Irish garb, with the thickly plaited shirt of yellow linen worn instead of armour, and a ponderous club wielded instead of a battle-axe or sword. To an ignominious stroke of that club the young hero who had fought at Zutphen, and stood beside the glorious Sir Philip Sidney when he resigned his own draught

of water to the expiring soldier, blushed to remember that he owed his present state: he remembered seeing his good sword fly shivered from his hand; the blow struck him from his horse, and the fall on the rock rendered him unconscious of what followed.

He had not seen the perplexity into which the victor was apparently plunged; he saw the young man was not dead; he was himself evidently unconnected with the assailants of the English troop, for he was quite unarmed, and until Sir Guy had attacked him under a contrary supposition, he had shown no hostile intention. Now, as he stood like the lion over some prey he cares not to devour, he seemed to feel both compunction and pity. The savage sounds that rudely filled the mild air of a lovely summer morn, told too plainly that the wild clansmen of the O'More would make short work with the wounded knight if they found him in their path.

A moment of consideration was enough for an Irish judgment to act upon. The senseless knight was lifted on the shoulder of his conqueror, and, hardly bending an

inch from his height beneath the weight, he strode away along the shore, keeping within the screen of the rocks until he came to a narrow point, a short distance from which appeared an isle of lofty rock rising in the sea; there, stepping firmly into a wicker boat, he laid his burthen down, took the oar, and moved off. Up the sides of the insulated rocks irregular steps were cut, by which he mounted, still bearing what might indeed seem to be the prey he was bringing to his den. He entered it by his own secret door—for among those rocks was a fortification discernible from the land—and, slipping the finely formed, but comparatively puny body of the unconscious Sir Guy from his enormous shoulders, he laid it down on the floor of the turret-chamber, unseen by any who occupied that strong abode, for the sun had not yet risen, and no one, save the sleepless chieftain of Fitzclare, was yet stirring around his sea-girt fortress. Two others were afterwards admitted to a knowledge of this occurrence: an occurrence replete with danger to the chief who thus rashly exposed himself to a double danger.

The present tendency to recover rather than to die, on the part of the English youth, became a source of trouble and anxiety to the old woman who was appointed to watch him ; her profound silence continued to annoy her patient. Days passed without any voice or sound ever meeting his ear ; the apparition he had beheld he believed to have been only a delusion of his wandering brain ; but that there was some danger to be apprehended he understood from the fact that whenever he raised his voice, as people will do when they want their language to be understood, the yellow folds not only vehemently shook, but the finger of the old Irishwoman pointed warningly to the door of the cell. Nevertheless, his head was carefully dressed, the wound on his side her medicaments had nearly cured, and Sir Guy become fully convinced that the poor creature did not possess the gift of speech, simply because he was satisfied that if that gift were in her keeping he should have tempted her to use it.

CHAPTER II.

THE evening meal was prepared in the rude hall of the rock-built fortress, and a tribe of dependants and retainers awaited there the presence of their chief to take his place at the board. He came at last : slowly stalking into the hall, he waved his hand, as his manner now often was, as a signal for the meal to commence, and turning his back upon them, sat gazing out on the waves that were visible through the open door.

Their chieftain's air and manner imposed at first a restraint upon the clansmen, but as he sat absorbed in thought, their voices began to be heard again. Seated on piles of rushes, or benches of rude construction, they talked loudly in their native speech,

and, notwithstanding the troublesome times in which they lived, they often—

“Laughed full loud and laughed full long,”

while the chieftain appeared altogether insensible to their noise or mirth. This gravity was apparently participated by one of the vassals at table. A face of remarkable expression, dark and sinister, was turned sideways towards the moody chieftain; the eyes, black, and retreating beneath a prominent brow, shot out a fiery gleam indicative of the smouldering passion that was secretly cherished in the soul.

After some minutes' silent scrutiny, this man rose, and a stranger, who beheld the effect of such an action for the first time, could hardly forbear either a laugh or an exclamation of surprise. Judging by the proportions of the head, face, and chest, the figure, while seated, would be said to be six feet high, but, on rising, it abruptly descended to the stature almost of a dwarf; when it advanced and stood beside the O'Connor, the length of the entire legs was not greater than that of his from the knee

to the foot. Nature could scarcely inflict a more mortifying disappointment on her work.

In addition to thus marring what would otherwise have been a fine figure, she had bestowed on this man a singularly pitched tone of voice, high and shrill. That voice was reduced to its lowest key when approaching the chief, he said—

“My lord is sad ; shall Fedlim take the harp, or the Lady Hilda?”

“Nay,” was the answer, “song and tale suit me not now ; when the pride of a house is brought low, the harp of the bard may be silent.”

“Is it the O'Connor who thus desponds ? The chief of the seven castles !” inquired the follower.

“Mock me not, Lawrence ! Thou knowest well that I am no longer what my fathers were—what I once was : I am but the shadow of glory that has passed away. A great part of the inheritance of my fathers hath been given up to the stranger ; that which is left to me I am compelled to hold upon terms their noble, untamed spirits would have spurned.”

“A peculiar grievance oppresses you, my lord,” said the other, in a manner that might imply either a question or an assertion of the fact.

“Grievance !—yes, grievance if thou wilt :—Know you not that O'More has fled to the hills? that his fortress has been burned? his cattle seized?”

“And the brother of Dervolla was unaided by the O'Connor!” exclaimed his listener, as if the exclamation were involuntary.

“Silence !” cried the chief, starting to his feet, and in a voice that made the rude vaulted hall ring to its echoes, stilling the noise that had hitherto filled it.

“Wherefore goad me thus?” asked the chief, calming at once his anger, and resuming his place.

“Zeal for the honour of his lord sometimes outruns his follower's prudence,” replied this man, in a tone of wounded feeling.

“You seek my weal, Lawrence, but I would thou didst not so often probe my heart, and seem to taunt me with my

powerlessness ; thou well knowest I am but a caged eagle—a prisoned lion ; thou hast seen how long and fruitlessly I struggled with the Saxon : Desmond, Eustace, have fallen ; my eldest boy, my gallant son—” The chieftain laid his face on his large, open hands, and groaned as he alluded to a fate he could not tell of. “ My wife, the beloved of my soul, the sister of the O'More, died, almost with her first-born. To save her two other children, and in the hope of purchasing peace for myself, she made me make terms with the Deputy. The half of my lands were given up ; but then, while we dwelt in peace, O'Neil broke out in arms ; my fidelity, they said, was suspected ; hostages were to be taken to secure the chiefs from joining him ; my last remaining son was taken, and still is kept in the English Pale. His life depends on my submission—on my actions, even ; and I, knowing that such was the case, retired to this stronghold, where I might for a time seclude myself and the fair child whose young life is darkened by the misfortunes of her house. I know that still my remaining lands are coveted, mayhap

are promised, to the strangers ; slight would be the cause which should furnish a pretence for seizing them."

"But there was a rescue?" said Lawrence, whose thoughts had not apparently followed his lord's mournful recapitulation of circumstances he was well acquainted with.

"Of the O'More's goods?—yes, and vengeance, fearful vengeance, taken."

"Ha! vengeance is sweet," murmured Lawrence, and again that fiery light shone up in the eye that was directed to the downcast face of his chief.

"And the O'Connor aided in taking it," he added.

"I tell thee nay,—I must not, will not—it was restlessness drew me forth that night ; it was self-defence alone."—O'Connor looked up and met the eager, burning gaze that was fastened on him.

"Vengeance," said Lawrence, adroitly, "is sweet ; it pleaseth me to hear of it. But speech like this is not at all times fitting nor safe. The Lady Hilda fears to adventure herself abroad since this has chanced?"

“She has other cares,” said the chief, not perceiving that the last words were a question meant to ascertain whether the lady was acquainted with the occurrence; “Canna requires her help.” And while saying this the O'Connor rose and left the hall, full of thought and heaviness of heart.

His follower resumed his place on the bench ranged along the wall, and, drawing into a retired corner, set himself to work out the various hints he received from the incautious discourse of his chief.

The day following that discourse, Sir Guy D'Esterre found himself left for a longer time than usual quite alone; the object of his detestation, the old yellow-headed Celt, having supplied him with an Irish change of linen, and deposited some eatables within his reach, examined his wounds, and departed in a manner that led him to understand she was going to collect some fresh medicaments for his benefit. In a recess of the chamber he discovered the dress and armour he had worn on the day of his misadventure, and, coming to the wise conclusion that his strength would not

increase by confinement and sick-nursing, he managed to equip himself without much difficulty. A doubt as to whether he was a prisoner or not had often tormented his mind ; it was, therefore, with some impatience that he hastened to try if the door of his chamber were secured without. It yielded at once to his hand, and, joyfully completing his toilet, the young man prepared to sally forth and surprise his charitable hosts by his unexpected apparition in their family quarters. His door opened into a square hall, of small size, with doors similar to that he had left ; these were easily opened, and admitted him into rooms precisely like the one he had so discontentedly occupied ; but no mode of egress from them could he find. The idea that he *was* a prisoner began very uncomfortably to present itself ; but it was combated by the fact that there must be a means of entering and leaving the tower, and that the entrance, if he could only find it, might be as open to him as to another.

His search, however, was vain, and he was forced to come to the conclusion that

the place in which he was, was designed for secret purposes, and the mode of access to it was a concealed one.

There was no resource but one—to watch the entry of his old guardian, secure her, and depart by the way she came.

Sir Guy, calming himself by reflection on the facility of effecting this plan, had thrown himself on a bench in the hall or passage of the tower, when a wild exclamation of wonder or fear caused him to start to his feet. Beside him stood the old Celt: how she had got there he knew not.

“Show me the way out,” he exclaimed.

She shook her head.

“You spoke just now—speak, or you shall never do so more!”

Not only the head, but the whole of the poor creature’s body, shook now.

The knight grasped her shoulder.

“Conduct me hence, old crone, or thou diest!”

She sank on her knees, and, drawing a wooden crucifix from her breast, fell to prayer, moving her lips with rapidity. Sir Guy felt ashamed of his violence.

“Hear me, mother,” he said, more gently, “sorry should I be to do thee harm; I owe thee thanks and recompense, which thou shalt have for thy care of me; but I must go hence, and without delay. Come now, guide me to the entrance of this cursed lodging, which, sooth to say, is harder to come at than that of a better place. I would not hurt a hair of thy old head to be made the ruler of thy vile land: but lead me out thou shalt, and that without further parley. What! thy head is shaking again! Well, then, hear me—I will not hurt thee—but thou shalt never leave this place till I do so too.”

He drew her into the room he had lately occupied, and then, exchanging places with her, left her there while he resumed his seat outside it, taking care not to lose sight of that door lest she should effect an escape.

Five minutes' meditation, he thought, was enough to subdue her obstinacy, and at the end of that time his impatience to get out led him to try its result. To his astonishment, the room was empty!

It was so small and so bare that a very

rapid glance sufficed to show him the old woman was not in it. He kicked away the bed of rushes, under some suspicion, perhaps, that she had in her terror hid beneath it; or perhaps the movement was stimulated by that emotion of anger to which the young knight, who had hitherto been a rather favoured nursling of Fortune, had latterly become subject. She was not hid beneath the rushes; and Sir Guy's first conviction was that, beyond all controversy, the old hag was a witch.

"She is a witch," he cried, as he pitched the rushes about in his anger. But a burst of suppressed laughter followed the words. He stood utterly confounded in the centre of the room, gazing around it.

There was no door but the one; the walls were pierced, as is usual in fortifications;—these narrow openings being the only channels of light and air.

"That was not an old woman's laugh—it was the laughter of a young heart," said the now doubly tantalized Sir Guy, as, rushing to the loophole, he vainly endeavoured to see through it. A glimpse of the ocean was all he could discern.

“Yet she cannot be a witch—she used the holy rood,” was his sager recollection; and, therefore, that she had got away by mere human, if not by ordinary means of exit, became clear. The laugh he had heard provoked him most of all. With some vexation he recalled the memory of the vision he had fancied he had seen on first regaining consciousness, but which had latterly passed from his thoughts under the belief that it had been a delusion of the brain.

“Such a being as that, if she were indeed what she seemed, could never mock my misery with her laughter,” thought Sir Guy to himself; but what was ludicrous in his own position—a captive in the guardianship of an old nurse—struck him so forcibly that he involuntarily echoed the laugh that had provoked him. It was joined in, evidently close beside him, but the sound was retreating, and smothered or silenced almost immediately.

Many a tale of knights confined in enchanted bowers was familiar to Sir Guy, but he knew it could not be the old woman

who prayed with the crucifix that was the enchantress, and if it should be she who laughed so tantalizingly, he fervently wished she would appear.

Evening drew on ; the setting sun cast its bright rays through the narrow opening in his chamber ; there was food enough to keep him from present starvation in his chamber, but the young knight had now an appetite for something better, and had he seen his old Celt rising like a veritable witch through the floor, he would gladly have taken a good supper from her hands. Leaving his room, he paced heavily and moodily through the outer hall and the several chambers, of which he had flung all the doors open, in order to see in what manner his strange attendant would come, if come she would.

His weary rounds ended with the departure of the sunbeams : even in those cell-like chambers he could tell that the soft shade of evening was falling over the earth. Listless and perplexed, he re-entered what he now began to think was indeed his prison-cell. At its threshold he stopped with a surprise

that soon gave way to pleasure, for there, on the rough misshapen board that served as a table, was spread a good and substantial meal, with a flask of wine.

Such a repast, though he ate it sitting on the old Celt's block of wood, tended wonderfully to subdue the irritation of the young soldier's spirits. He began to think that some jest was being played off at his expense, and determined on the morrow to find out the perpetrator of that hearty, child-like, but most provoking laugh ; and with that resolution he gathered together the rushes he had so madly kicked about, recomposed his couch, and consigned himself, as he thought, to sleep.

CHAPTER III.

SLEEP, nature's best mediciner for the woes that flesh is heir to, would not close the eyes of the much perplexed knight. Where he could be, and with whom; for what purpose he was detained; and how his liberation was to be effected, were naturally the topics on which he pondered. If he was with enemies, why was he so carefully tended; if with friends, why were they not visible, and why was his freedom restricted. If he were in the hands of robbers, or of the rebel Irish, his ransom would surely be accepted; but with whom was he to make terms, since the obstinate silence of the old woman, and the mysterious nature of his imprisonment, debarred him from all attempts at negotiation.

The sun had not yet fully risen on the earth when he uprose from his lowly bed, and, with negligent impatience attiring himself, left his cell, in order to make another tour of inspection through those adjoining it. He had not proceeded far when he perceived a stair that had not been visible the day before, and which he was now convinced had then been masked, and was, at this early hour, incautiously exposed. With a bound he ascended it ; a sudden turn brought upon him a burst of light and air, and a few steps onward placed him on the battlement of the tower.

With a sense of exultation, of renovation to his enfeebled frame and sickening mind, Sir Guy sprang lightly on the embattled platform that ran round the tower, at an elevation of not more than four or five feet from the windows of the chambers he had left. The gladdening sense of liberty was lost in the feelings suddenly awakened by the scene that now lay before him. From where he stood the rude fortress appeared to crest a vast rock, the surface of which formed a level platform extending

several yards beneath him, the sides of which were nearly smooth, unbroken, and precipitous, affording no visible mode of ascent or descent. At their base the sea, chafed and tossed by reefs and isolated rocks at this stilly time, broke with the loud sound that had been distinguishable within his chamber. But at a little distance it now lay calm and blue, stretching off, unrelieved by any object on its surface, to the distant horizon where, just as the young man sprang out from his gloomy cell to behold it, the morning sun came forth with a glorious bound, rising up, as it were, from its bed of waters, and rejoicing as a giant to run his course.

Guy D'Esterre was an enthusiast innature: the scene before him caused him to forget his own trouble and perplexity, and it was not until the emotion it excited had subsided, that he became fully sensible how much the sublimity of the scene militated against any attempt of his own to escape from his irksome position. As he leaned on the battlement with an impatient feeling, not unmingled with dismay at finding his capti-

vity was too evidently designed, a low sound of voices struck on his ear : they were the first he had heard in this place, with the exception of the terrified cry of his old attendant when she saw her patient was not only alive, but well again. A slight projection of his head allowed him to see that others were apparently enjoying the glorious sight of a sunrise at sea.

Beneath him, on the platform of rock, and a few yards to one side of the elevated spot he occupied, stood two female figures : one was tall, the other in stature appeared not to have passed the age of childhood. The arm of the elder was round the waist of the younger, who looked up to her face with brown shiny eyes, which seemed rather more intended to gleam in laughter than to melt in tears. The eyes of the other gazed out to the sunlit, sparkling ocean, glistening in ripples of gold beneath the uprising sun.

The heart of Sir Guy thrilled with an emotion to which it had yet been almost a stranger, as he beheld those eyes. The eyes, face, and form, were those with which

he fancied his wandering senses had invested an unreal being. But she was there in real presence, and was precisely the vision that had bent a face of pity and wonder over him as he lay hardly restored to consciousness on his rushy couch. But now the expression of that face, which had appeared to his fancy as one that his guardian angel might present to him, was changed; a pensiveness amounting to sadness had supplied its place.

The younger girl pointed to the sun-glowing horizon, looking up to her sister's face with a smile of hope. That lovely face bent down upon her childlike head, and a kiss was the only answer. A movement, as if to go away, followed.

With one considerably more rapid Sir Guy swung himself on the parapet, and dropped from the height of a dozen feet upon the rock. The youngest girl screamed, the elder, in silence, but with clasped hands and a look of terror, sprang to the spot where he fell. His unrestored strength caused the shock of such a descent on the rock to be severely felt; and a minute or

two passed before he could reply to her terrified exclamation—an exclamation which delighted him not the less that it was made in English. But while he spoke in courtly terms, an aspect of proud severity became plainly legible on the face whose gentleness he had found so captivating.

“To adventure life or limb thus heedlessly, methinks a graver cause should be found,” she made answer to a speech which, fashioned though it was in the phraseology of commonplace gallantry, was not really untrue to the sentiments that had actuated Sir Guy.

“Madam,” he replied, rather mortified at her look and words, “a grave, if not a graver, cause did exist. Sir Guy D’Esterre sought some one endowed with the power of speech, to whom he might render thanks for the service and care bestowed upon him, and to whom he might also say that, being now restored to health, he was able and willing to depart, and need no longer burthen their hospitality.”

A singular smile slightly curved the beautiful lip of his listener. It said, what indeed

was the truth, that the lady did not give him the least credit for sincerity in thus politely expressing himself. That he had known he was confined as a prisoner, and that his rash descent from the battlements was simply made in the hope of escape, were to her mind obvious facts.

“You wrong me, lady,” said Sir Guy, more coldly, as he read at once the significance of an expression easy to be understood,—“I came to this country in the service of her Grace, the Queen. Sooth to say, it is neither a service nor a land much to my liking! How I came hither I know not; I am beset with mysteries. That I am among enemies, the charity bestowed on a sufferer forbids me to believe; that I am with friends, the bearing that I now witness scantily allows me to hope.”

The lady turned her lovely eyes upon his face; the young knight felt his colour mounting high, but an open brow and honest countenance met and stood the calm, inquiring gaze. It was not continued many seconds: the deep white eyelids and long black lashes were declined, and the graceful

neck drooped, while a slight blush appeared to be repressed by a shade of heavy thoughtfulness.

Sir Guy did not withdraw his answering gaze so quickly. At that moment two good and honest minds had unconsciously exchanged a sentiment of confidence.

"Alas!" said the girl, still with downcast head, "alas! it is even so! Enemies we are not, friends we cannot be."

"You speak enigmas, lady—surely this is a castle of enchantment!" cried Sir Guy; but, as he uttered the words, a large, loose stone, that lay on a projecting part of the building suddenly fell from its place on the rock close beside them. His companion sprang, with a look of almost wild affright, to his side, yet extending her arm rather as if she would shield him than seek protection from him. Mistaking the object, however, he caught her in his, hastily feeling for the sword he no longer possessed. The little girl, who had shily kept at a distance, ran laughing up to them, crying as she came—

"Fear not, fear not, there is no one there; it was the eagle only, Hilda."

“Did you see it, Isabel?” asked the other, disengaging herself, yet tremblingly; then, to Sir Guy’s surprise, changing her language into Spanish, which was not quite unknown to him, she anxiously inquired if a man’s face had not appeared looking over the rock at the stranger.

“I think not, I am sure not, Hilda; the eagle I saw alight there not five minutes before, and it was hovering round the spot,” Isabel, in the same language, answered.

“Thy name is Hilda, then, fairest lady?—a northern or Norman name,—I, too, am of Norman descent,” said Sir Guy, in his softest tones; for his feelings towards his beautiful warder were considerably softened, or soothed, by the weakness she had shown in clinging, as he fancied, to his protection. Without noticing either the tone or rather familiar speech, the lady said—

“Stranger, our parleying here can do thee no good, but, on the contrary, may do thee harm. Return whence thou camest.”

The last sentence was a command. Guy D’Esterre opened his fearless brown eyes, and smiled that sort of smile which proud,

powerful man bestows on the petty assumption of strength by powerless woman.

“And if I will not so to do?”—was his unfinished and rather taunting rejoinder.

Hilda shuddered. She dropped her joined hands before her with a touching gesture.

“For my sake—for ours, if not for your own—I implore”—

Sir Guy bowed low and respectfully.

“Enough, fair lady ; show me the way back ; I yield me a willing prisoner to thy request.”

The lady, taking the young girl's hand, preceded him in silence to the extremity of the rocky platform, where a secret entrance admitted them to the lower floor of the keep, for such, he now perceived, was the place of his confinement. A concealed door revealed a very narrow flight of stone steps, at the top of which he found himself in utter darkness, but his conductors, accustomed to it, went on ; a slightly creaking sound was followed by the admission of light, and Sir Guy beheld himself at once within his own cell.

A low laugh that was breaking from the

rosy lips of the younger girl, and only repressed by the hand of the elder, reminded him of the provocation he had before experienced ; he felt glad to know that such wild laughter had not proceeded from her whose face and form betokened a mind as dignified as sweet.

The escape of his old Celtic attendant now appeared to him to have been easily effected without the necessity of witchcraft. The rough walls of this small chamber were thickly set with pebbles and shells ; a false wall or screen, made exactly to correspond, formed the means of communication with the dark passage by which access and egress were obtained. The extreme simplicity of the device prevented it from being easily discovered ; but without the knowledge of the means by which it was moved, the discovery would have been useless. While his pride was soothed by thus ascertaining that he was not, as he had suspected, merely made a sport of since his recovery to health, the anxiety he felt as to his detention was redoubled. As his warders, with a lowly salutation, were about to leave him in solitude,—

"I crave one word," said Sir Guy, with an earnest gravity that made them pause. "I have done your bidding, lady, and mean, as far as in me lies, to obey your behests ; it is but justice now I would ask for."

"We thought the word was unknown to Saxons," said Hilda ; "you must pardon us, therefore, sir knight, if we are unable to discuss it with you."

An impatient movement of Sir Guy's foot on the floor spoke of anger, which even his gallantry could scarcely repress.

"Such taunts, madam, are needless. I have said I like not my service in this land ; if injustice be done to its natives, it is not willingly done by me. I demand, then, to know for what purpose I am detained here. If ransom be the object, it is forthcoming."

A look of intense pain was the only reply.

"As to why you are detained, I fear me, you, and we too, shall shortly know," after a long pause she said, in a voice of sorrow, and turned to leave him.

"Lady, I conjure you," he cried, springing in her way, "tell me, at least, into whose power I have fallen—by whom I am detained?"

The same gaze that had lately made them almost good friends was again fastened on his countenance.

"Is it truth?" said she thoughtfully, and speaking as if to herself. "Tell me," she added, "as truly as you hope for peace here or hereafter, know you not, indeed, with whom you are?"

"Is he the rebel chief, O'More?"

"Rebel!—but let it pass. No, the O'More hath nought to do with this."

"Then, truly, as I hope for peace and happiness on earth or in heaven, I can guess no other."

"The blessed saints be praised!" exclaimed the lady, with a look of gratitude that rendered her lovely face still lovelier. "Farewell, Sir Guy, we will labour for your deliverance, and pray that it may be speedily accomplished."

"Thanks! thanks!" cried the young man, warmly; "the day that restores me my freedom shall leave me thy captive. Till then," he added, "will not my gentle warder lighten the miseries of solitude by her occasional presence?"

A deep blush during this speech had overspread the usually pale face of the girl to whom it was addressed. She bent over her young companion's head, perhaps in order to conceal it, and spoke to her in a whisper. Then, as if an agreement had been made between them, she replied to his petition.

"We will do what lies in our little power to lighten those miseries. But I bethink me," she said with a smile that animated her whole countenance, "that captive knights are wont to give their parole of honour, by which they are bound to keep within the limits prescribed for their enlargement, or to render themselves to durance when the term of liberty expires."

Sir Guy bowed with gravity in acquiescence.

"You will, then, find henceforth," she continued, "the door leading to the battlements always left open, as it was, accidentally, at the early hour when you discovered it this morning. Your word must be given to keep only on the same eastern side on which you were just now; and on no account whatever to turn from it to the north, south, or west."

"My parole is given, fair warder, on the honour of knighthood. But may not your captive, still keeping to the east of his prison tower, be permitted to descend on the rock below?"

"Such a daily exercise, methinks, would become severe," she gravely answered, while the little girl broke into an irrepressible laugh."

"Perhaps use might accustom my limbs to it," said he, joining in the laugh with restored spirits; "but, by my troth, ladies, I would undertake such a daily exercise with good will, if, instead of that yellow-headed crone, I might behold the faces that impelled me to essay it this morn."

"Nay," said Hilda, "we accept no homage at the expense of our faithful nurse: we forbid your bounds to be broken by any such rash descent." And she hastily reclosed the screen between herself and the prisoner, leaving him with abundant matter for thought and speculation, which, with the discussion of a very substantial breakfast, might tend to beguile some portion of his dreary hours.

Before the latter occupation had ended, a low chanting sound, appearing to rise from underneath his apartment, suspended his operations; he had heard it, he thought, during his illness; but now it became loud and distinct, so that the voices were as plainly heard by him as if he had been in the chapel, or oratory, whence this sweet and sacred harmony came.

"The day drags on, though clouds keep out the sun," and so, though the rest of that day was uncheered by any further glimpse of his morning apparitions, Sir Guy contrived to get through it, being considerably aided thereto by a book which he found conveyed into his chamber, together with his noontide repast, during another of his elevated walks.

That the terrified old nurse would henceforth keep out of his way, he now perceived, and any visitor being almost better than none, he repented of the rudeness he had showed to her.

Night had fallen while he read, when a slight noise caused him to start up. A small packet attached to a string fell through

the narrow window to the floor. Sir Guy hastily seized the lamp that was still burning, and, untying the packet, found it only to contain these words, written in misshapen characters:—"If you still desire relief from your friends, enclose a token in this packet, and drop it from the window."

Never doubting but the merry little Isabel was the author of this trick, which he supposed would insure him the society of his fair wardens on the morrow, he drew off a ring bearing his cipher, and, enclosing it as he was directed, threw it through the window.

CHAPTER IV.

WEARILY had passed a long summer's day. How many times the unfortunate captive had patrolled the eastern side of the battlements of his prison tower he had not kept count of, but he knew that, save for the benefit of air, light, and a view of the ocean, his walks had all been in vain. No other sight had met his searching eye; no sound, save the monotonous roll of the waves, had relieved his ear.

The glaring sun had moved to the west, where he was prohibited by his parole from following it; and, in the hope that the coolness of the platform rock would now tempt the visitors who had there watched the sunrise to enjoy the refreshment of its departure, Sir Guy D'Esterre had once more sallied

forth from his cell, and paced again his sentry walk with measured tread, the sound of which might have been plainly audible to the dwellers in the lower apartments of the keep, if such there were; but, heard or not, that tread was permitted to go on undisturbed; and, with a strong sense of disgust at his lately accorded privilege, the discontented prisoner returned to his cell.

Seated on the block of wood, with limbs stretched down to their utmost extent before him, and arms—must we say it?—raised in like manner in the contrary direction, Sir Guy D'Esterre yawned most fearfully.

This was his first imprisonment, and that, considering the times he lived in, is not saying little for his good fortune or discreet conduct. It is no marvel, then, that he took it impatiently, especially under the mysterious and tantalizing circumstances that attended it.

His yawn was interrupted in the same way that his breakfast had been, but this time by a fuller and diviner burst of sacred harmony. It was the hour of vespers, and one voice,

that floated up and around him in rich and heavenly tones, was a woman's: he heard another also, and was satisfied that both his lovely warder and the young girl whom he supposed was her sister were assisting in the divine service, the performance of which, hope, or perhaps vanity, suggested had been removed into his immediate vicinity with a view to his consolation.

Another reflection speedily checked this pleasure. "Was it thus, then, she engaged to lighten the miseries of my solitude! Pooh! After all, there is something nun-like about that girl. What a noble lady abbess she would make!—severe and cold enough—and with that proud bearing and graceful stature! They say the cloistered nun knows not of earthly sympathies. Such a face as hers must change when the heart it so plainly reveals becomes thus insensible. Well! nuns are out of fashion in these days, as well as the Mass—though the people of this cursed land are still Papishers. I would fain speak with this strange damsel again, were it only to revoke my parole, and tell her I would seek by all means I could devise to escape from this den.

With the thought the weary knight arose and regained his post on the battlement. The calm scene before him was soothing. The light of day still lingered, and blended with that of the moon, which stood pale and clear in the deep blue summer sky, its beams, as the daylight faded, faintly glittering in the rippling sea. Sir Guy leaned over the parapet, feeling something of the poetic spirit of the hour and scene, which, as these always do, recalled his mind to other times, and to companions and friends from whom he was so strangely parted, and who were in ignorance of his fate.

“They think me dead, slain in a miserable foray—knocked on the head as a midnight robber by one of the vile Irishry. Would that I had never given my word—I would now gain my liberty, or lose my life.” He projected his head over the parapet as these thoughts arose, and very complete was the change of feeling which the action produced.

Almost beneath the balcony, so nearly beneath where he stood as to be hitherto unseen, was a singular group. An aged man in a loose, flowing, white robe, with a beard

still whiter descending half a yard in length upon his breast, and hair as colourless, profusely covering his shoulders, sat on a rude seat, holding before him the long celebrated harp of his country. Beside him stood the two young girls; the costume of the elder, although equally that of her nation, contrasting with the simpler dress of the bard. A kirtle of dark blue was surmounted by a curiously fashioned mantle of a deep golden colour, partly drawn in folds to the throat, where it was fastened by one of those large gold brooches now familiar to the antiquary, and falling in a point behind almost to the feet of the wearer. Her black hair, of a wondrous length and richness, was gathered over a large silver bodkin, but still fell in long plaits from her shoulders, whose graceful slope the peculiar form of the mantle was adapted to reveal.

All three were silent: the bard, leaning his white head upon the harp, seemed full of thought, or was, perhaps, meditating a theme for song. Scarcely would the prospect of his deliverance have tempted Sir Guy to break the silence, or disturb the group, on

which his eyes rested with sensations of interest that had been hitherto unknown to him.

A wild prelude rang out from the harp, stealing up on the sea-wafted breeze of evening to his ear ; a voice of wild and melancholy melody followed. It was the wail of the Genius of the land. The captive knight involuntarily sighed over the departed glory, of which the dirge was sung.

When it ceased, the old man again bent his head on the harp. A short conversation in Irish, unintelligible to the listener, followed, and then the little girl, taking up a small instrument, seated herself on the rock, and the rich voice he had heard at vespers accompanied her, as they sung together a Spanish hymn. Sir Guy, when they stopped, leaned down, and in a subdued tone breathed in words some of the enraptured feeling he had experienced. The little girl started, and from shyness, fear, or to repress her ready laughter, covered her face with her open hands. A deep flush suffused that of the elder, but, without turning it to the admiring knight, she held up her finger as an admonitory and warning signal.

“More mysteries,” said Sir Guy, with irritation, to himself; “they must neither see nor hear me now. I wish they would at least sing to me what a common mortal might understand.”

But a thought darted to his brain, creating a sudden pain, the origin of which he was unconscious of—was this Hilda the wife of some jealous tyrant, some savage of the Irishry, whose displeasure she dreaded to excite by her kindness to his prisoner? The fear she had shown when some observer was suspected to be on the rock, the allusions he had heard made in Spanish—of which language he understood more than they supposed—to the present absence and expected return of someone at whose disposal, it would seem, his fate lay, and for whom she acted as deputy—this flashed upon him, like a new light on a bewildered mind, but accompanied with a sensation exceedingly disagreeable, and one that Sir Guy D'Esterre, had he been more experienced in such cases, might probably have pronounced to be very like that of jealousy itself.

“What right has any Irish savage, and

rebel into the bargain, to such a wife as that?" he indignantly asked himself, as there was no other to put the question to. "It is absurd ; improbable—every way an impossibility ;—nevertheless, if she will neither look at nor speak to me, I will neither look at nor listen to her longer."

And with an emotion of spite and absolute craving to avenge himself on some one, or on anything, Sir Guy went back to his cell, and spent his irritation on the wooden blocks and the rushes of his couch.

His precipitate retreat was observed, and not unlamented.

"You see now that he will never be satisfied," said the little girl, "he will go from bad to worse—when he gets an inch of liberty he will want an ell. So he will go on till you never can hold him ; he will break bounds some day and get clean away. Then will he to the Saxon camp, and Morven—ah ! Hilda,—may not some evil happen to Morven from this ?"

Hilda drew the little head upon her breast.

"Sweet Isabel, fear not thus. Morven is very dear to me also. But, Isabel, sure I am that concern for his safety should lead us to make this stranger our friend."

"You are always right, Hilda, always,—the stranger is of noble and gracious presence, handsome withal—is he not, Hilda?—those brown eyes looked so bright and fearless yester-morn when he held you in his arm."

"Cease, dear one!—such prattle suits us not now. Thy loving heart, my Isabel, outgrows thy years."

"I am fifteen—fifteen, and well nigh a fourth of another year; and of Spanish birth," she said, with a pretty boastfulness.

"And already a plighted wife," said Hilda, in a voice of grave and tender sadness; "the betrothed of a hostage in the English Pale." The shining eyes of the little girl were suffused—

"Hilda, I would fain go as a minstrel boy, or disguised as a page, or an old fortune-teller, to the English camp, to learn tidings of Morven."

Hilda sighed.

"My brother's silence wearies me, too," she said,—“the only brother left to me—he will be thine one day, Isabel, if he live, and then I shall be alone—yet not alone.”

Isabel clung to her companion.

“I know now thy thoughts, most naughty Hilda: a convent and a sister's hood are floating before thy fancy.”

“Nay, dear child, thou art wrong now; it is true, such a fancy often visits me, but now I thought only of the other, the first and strongest of the ties of earth which must bind me to it, though Morven and thou wert gone. He will return to-morrow, and I tremble to think of what will be his state when he hears that the Saxon soldier he sheltered and succoured from motives of pity is not only alive and well, but is a knight of consideration in the service of Elizabeth of England.”

“But if he only succoured and sheltered him here?” said Isabel.

“Alas! how vainly would such causes be represented at the court of the Deputy! and besides, the truth must be told, it was from his hand the Saxon knight met his wound.

A less offence is readily construed into an act of rebellion."

"And then, his hostage?"—cried Isabel, bursting into tears.

"Nay, weep not, mavourneen," said Hilda, fondly, yet with sadness: "weep not till cause for weeping come. I trust this knight; I pray that others may do so, too; did it rest with me, he should ere now have been sent hence."

"Truly," said the lighter-minded Isabel, smiling among her tears, "he has given us some pastime in this dreary solitude; but for all that, rather than that one lock of Morven's head should fall, I could wish his comely form were now where some folk deem it to be."

"Wicked sprite!" whispered a voice above them, so low that they heard it not; for, his vexation being soon expended, the object of all their perplexity had wandered back to his former station, and, concealed by a buttress, was nearer to them than he had been before.

Some light dawned on the perplexities of his case. The discourse to which he had been a listener—the bard having withdrawn,

and the girls, not suspecting the knight's return, having spoken so audibly that, in the stillness which reigned around, every word was distinct—was full of interest to him, not only on his own account, but for the family story of which it gave him a glimpse. That Hilda's anxiety did not arise from fear of a husband's jealousy, his vanity ceased to suggest; but whether a husband were in the family story or not, he could not determine.

The facts of his case, which he gathered from it, were these. He had been conveyed to this island-fortress in an apparently dying state, from a benevolent desire of saving him from the infuriated clan of O'More; the impulse, rashly yielded to, had been followed by regret and anxiety: he was kept in secret, lest the fact of his being assaulted and detained should be known at the English camp, and thus endanger the life of one of those hostages who, according to a recent practice, had been taken by the English Lord Deputy as a pledge for the submission and fidelity of his father's clan.

Such reflections were broken off by the voice of Hilda. She had sat in silent

thought, seldom finding it necessary to answer all the wild speeches of her younger companion.

"Isabel," she said, but in a voice provokingly indistinct, "tell me, are you certain that you saw the eagle yonder yester-morn, when the fragment fell from that projecting rock?"

"When you clung to the Saxon soldier? —Yes, I certainly thought I saw it, but it was gone instantly : but wherefore look so sad for that?"

"I fear some treachery," Hilda answered ; "I fear there is a traitor among us ; old Canna doubts there is, and she is wiser than most. What if he were even now to depart to the Saxons, and give tidings of this?"

With a bound she started from her seat, and vanished within the concealed entrance to the lower apartments of the tower.

Young Isabel more slowly arose, and, facing to where Sir Guy was, stood looking onward with fully opened and rather wondering eyes : her child-like figure, her innocent, merry face, and fawn-like shyness, rendering it difficult to believe that already

her heart had awakened to the emotions of womanhood. The captive knight, leaning over the parapet, addressed her aloud.

Trembling, blushing, uncertain whether to fly or to stand and listen, she remained as if transfixed, gazing up like the frightened child who looks anxiously in the face whose expression it fears. It was but a moment; and then, leaping from the slight elevation she stood upon, with outstretched hands she fled as if from the sight of a monster, and, overtaking the more stately Hilda, cried with vehemence—

“He has heard all—every word—what I said about him, too !”

“He has heard little that can do us hurt,” the other answered calmly, “save thy silly prattle, thou simple one; there was nought said I would not wish he might know. Therefore, though we designed it not, I am not grieved that it so chanced. I seek for Canna or Fedlim, Isabel, for I must know if any retainer be absent.”

Sir Guy D'Esterre meantime, amused at the little runaway, leaned on the parapet, and looked at the moon; a solace very ge-

nerally indulged in by persons in like circumstances. Its light had now become strong; the scenery was almost as clear as in the day, and the golden beams fell in long, bright, quivering lines upon the stilly sea. He thought, as we all at such seasons do, of past times, and thus diverted his gloomier reflections from the present.

CHAPTER V.

THE anxiety Sir Guy had felt concerning his own position had been all along mingled with a large portion of curiosity concerning the family history of the people among whom he found himself so singularly placed. That such a person as Hilda Fitzclare existed in a land so uncivilized, he had previously had no idea, and she was daily becoming to him still more a source of wonder, united to a considerable degree of interest. Their intercourse was becoming frequent, and, though evidently the cause of constant apprehension on her part, he felt that she had lost the reserve, and even acrimony of manner, with which she had at first treated him. She even went so far one day as to acknowledge that she considered

his present service an accident merely of his position, and his duty to his Queen rather a misfortune to be pitied than a crime to be resented.

"My present service is as hateful to me as it is to most others employed in it," said Sir Guy. "Yet," he added, with a smile, "I have not heretofore deemed it a misfortune to serve the most glorious Princess that Europe, or the world, has ever seen upon a throne."

Hilda regarded him for a moment with an inquiring expression, and then said—

"Is that your real sentiment, permit me to ask, or merely the current one which all use in addressing your Queen?"

"It is my real sentiment; one which posterity will verify. Do you not agree in it, fair lady?"

"I think," said Hilda, slowly, "that if report say true, Elizabeth of England unites in her character, and manifests in her conduct, the greatest and noblest qualities of men to the lowest follies, or the worst, most detestable vices of women."

Sir Guy stared, and then broke into a laugh.

"Heaven grant me a good deliverance if ever I come to be tried by a judgment so keen," he said, carelessly waiving a discussion which few of his country would be incautious enough to continue. Diverging into another track, he continued the conversation by remarking that the condition of Ireland was a sore grievance to the heart of his royal mistress.

"Since Mountjoy's war," he said, "she has been heard to say she had sent wolves, not shepherds, to care for this land, since they had left her but ashes and carcasses to reign over. She complains, and justly, that her treasury is wasted, her soldiers slaughtered, and no end gained."

"Why not, then, send us just rulers, and cause them to administer equitable laws?"

"Why, sooth to say, lady, your land appears to me to resemble that enchanted island on which whosoever landed straightway lost his senses and ran mad. For my part, the best wish I would utter for a friend who came to govern or to serve in it, would be for a fair wind to blow him from thence."

"Discourteous knight!" said the lady, with what he fancied was only a playfully assumed air of offence, "know you not we are of the land you revile?—at least," she added, as if correcting herself, "we claim to be more than half so."

"And for the other half," he rather eagerly interposed, "English, I trust?"

"Nay, not one drop of English blood ever has, ever shall—at least, I believe so,—mingle with that of our race," the lady replied, speaking proudly; but a bright blush and a slight air of confusion showed some involuntary hesitation in her intended affirmation.

"No," she continued, elevating her somewhat stately head, "my mother's mother was a Spanish dame; my mother lived in Spain till her marriage, and sent me there at an early age. I was brought home to see her before her death, and after that returned again, until the law, forbidding persons to send their children for education to foreign lands, caused my father—who feared, on my brother's account, to involve himself with the Government—to order me

home. Then this dear child, my Isabel, whose father, an exiled Irishman, died in Spain, and her mother, a Spanish lady, being also dead, left her to my care, accompanied me here to share all the miseries and uncertainties of such a home."

Sir Guy appeared to be intently listening to all this little family story, which, in truth, he had been rather curious to hear; but one part of it had, in reality, fastened on and engrossed his attention. That face he had seen before: he knew it—even when it appeared to his confused brain but as a spiritual vision, it was still one that had been beheld before. His gaze was now so earnest, so wondering, that Hilda turned her head haughtily away.

"Remember you Cadiz, lady?" he asked, with grave deliberation, while all the time he felt his heart pant for the answer, "remember you the convent?"

But ere he could finish, the averted face was turned back; the beautifully expressive eyes filled with tears, and the bright colour that glowed on the usually pale face made those eyes seem more dark and lovely.

“Methought, even when you lay senseless, that you were the same,” she said; “at least, if unremembered, I have thought of Cadiz, and of Santa Maria, as often as we have seen your face, or heard your voice—that gallant knight who, we were told, leaped after the banner of Essex from its walls, and who, generous as brave, restrained the rude soldiers of England from violence, and, with the noble Essex, preserved our convent and its treasures from their fury!”

“Its treasures?—its best of treasures!” added Sir Guy. “Remember you, also, the young girl, the wonderfully beautiful child, who stood in that convent chapel, one hand grasping the holy rood, the other holding to her side a weeping babe,—so calm, so haughty, defiant, was her aspect, that the conqueror of Cadiz might have owned her power?”

“It was a dreadful moment,” she said, without raising her eyes, or directly replying to his speech; “but already I had known one still more so,—here in my own country, when my poor brother was killed, and our father’s castle fired.”

“And then her words,” continued the English knight, as if he were talking to himself, and untempted, even by this fresh glimpse into the lady’s family history, to turn from the still more interesting picture that had been for some years fresh to his memory, “her words, as she stood facing the rude soldiers who had dared to enter that hallowed retreat,—‘Ye call yourselves men and Christians ; these are women in Christ’s sanctuary!’”

Hilda’s frame seemed to thrill with a sensation that sent the blood to her finely formed neck and white temples ; hastily she pressed her finger tops upon her eyes, concealing her face from the gaze that was fastened upon her.

The emotion was subdued as quickly as it rose.

“You remember childish words and bearing, sir knight,” she said, “but to excuse the forwardness of the little maid you must also remember that she was the only one there who knew the English tongue, or understood the reply of the captain of that fierce band, when, rushing in, he drove them

back, and then, presenting the hilt of his sword to the frightened child, said these words in answer :—‘ We trust to prove worthy of the names we call ourselves. Use this against my breast if aught of harm be done by us against thee or Christ’s servants and sanctuary !’

“ The fair child did not take the sword, however,” he replied, smiling, “ and well it was for me that her delicate hands refused it, for though ready at the moment to yield myself, rescue or no rescue, both the gallant Essex and myself had sharp work for our swords the next minute.”

“ Well do I remember that blast which sounded at our door, and how you rushed away,” said Hilda, forgetting that till then she had spoken as of a third person, “ and, though a guard was placed round our house, we saw our preserver no more.”

“ No ; because, I believe, by some mistake I was deemed by the people to be an invader rather than a preserver of that house ; and my soldiers found me left for dead on the ground. I had scarcely recovered of the wound when Essex was obliged, by the jealousy of

his rivals, and to his rage and indignation, to resign the possession of Cadiz; and the memory of that fearless child, and of the trembling nuns who were her instructors, crowding round their abbess at the altar,—while she, alone and erect, fronting the danger, protecting the little one, and protected herself only by the tall cross, has been to me ever since a memory-picture, which it may now be my lot to have supplanted by another.”

She did not attend to the last words, so as to feel their meaning.

“That noble Essex!” she said—“worthy of a better age, of better circumstances. He should have lived in the glorious times of chivalry, instead of wasting his prime of life as the guarded, fondled, darling of a care-taking old woman. Generous as brave, he guarded from insult and robbery the town he had taken; treated the women with chivalrous respect, and preserved inviolate the religious communities which in his own land would have been made a prey. Well did the Infanta admire him, and truly did the King he fought against say of him that such a gentleman was rare among the heretics!”

“Heretics! foul, dishonouring word,” said Sir Guy, with rising choler. “Thus does his Holiness of Rome brand all nations who refuse subjection to his universal dominion; no matter how closely soever their tenets may approach to his own; nay, if they were the same altogether. This very land, when the seat of learning and of the true faith, was held to be heretical, till our second Henry brought it into subjection to Rome. This it is that perpetuates or increases strife in this wretched land; for, having excommunicated our Queen, she must prohibit here a form of religion which acknowledges her subjects to be also the subjects of the Pope, who absolves them from their allegiance to her by way of binding them to himself.”

“Your exposition is a learned one, sir knight; but let me add to it the slight knowledge which our own family history gives me as to the cause of this heart-wearying strife and turmoil in this land, which you truly call a wretched one. It would seem to me that a new seed of rancour and confusion is now planted here, but this will only add to the original evil; because, if religion were the

cause, or the Pope the omnipotent ruler you say, wherefore was it that in the late reign, that of Queen Mary, who turned the new religion out and re-established the old, the case was nearly the same: war went on with her too? No! from the time of the Danes to the present, the mixture of races, the clashing interests of continually fresh-planted settlers, have caused this strife. My father's uncle, O'Connor, was kept prisoner in the Tower by Mary, although he was a rigid Catholic. When pardoned, he returned to reclaim his lands, but found they were to be bestowed on the Lord Deputy's followers, who grudged a release that so inconvenienced them. The holy name of Christ is now, indeed, beginning to be made a war-cry; and in future years it may be still more so; yet the change in religion has only aggravated, not caused, the distractions we suffer. There are many who would, and do, part with life rather than with faith; but there are many who part with faith rather than with gold. Here we may even see one who serves the altar, or who has served it, first as a reformed priest; then, by Mary's order, as a Catholic priest; and

afterwards, at Elizabeth's command, as a Protestant! You, sir knight, are of your Queen's religion?"

"Even as you are, lady; we all must be so."

"I believe she even calls herself the little Pope," said Hilda: "it is a curious fact in the world's history that a woman should fill such an office. But then, her worshippers address her in terms suited only to God Himself, which is going some steps beyond the subjects of his Holiness."

Sir Guy was spared the difficulty of replying by the appearance of the old nurse, who beckoned her young mistress and foster-child to her. Their conference was not long, but the latter came from it in agitation.

"Our intercourse must now cease," she said, rather hurriedly; "I crave pardon for requesting you to retire within the tower."

Sir Guy bowed.

"You have my parole, lady," he said, a little haughtily; "but when, I pray you, is this mystery likely to end?"

"Heaven only knows!—when—how!" she exclaimed, and dropped her clasped hands on her breast. "Oh! that this moment all these miseries should end, and the angels take me from this fearful world of sin and crime."

"And you will not trust me?" said Sir Guy, stepping closer to her,—“you will not let me know if I could serve you?”

"Serve me! Oh, no! I think not of myself—would to Heaven we had never met before, for to meet here is now terrible."

Before the last words were fully finished, she had turned away, uttering them, indeed, more as if expressing to herself than to him the sensations that caused them.

Sir Guy D'Esterre returned to his turret-chamber. His retrospections of the past blended somewhat strangely with his reflections upon the present.

He thought of that gallant time when, albeit its mode of sea warfare bordered narrowly on the piratical character, he had swept the sea with the adventurous spirits of the age, won Cadiz with the daring young Earl, and accompanied him when he sounded

his challenge to the Governor of the city of Lisbon, daring him to come out and do him single combat.

And now how very odd was his position ! A captive, as it seemed, at the will of a young and beautiful woman, whom he would not defy, yet grudged to obey. His parole was given to confine himself to a prescribed boundary ; and, as long as she kept him company there, and did not arbitrarily enforce obedience, truth to tell, the gallant knight bore his thralldom more patiently than might have been anticipated from his natural temperament ; but there were times when the reverse of these conditions occurred, and at such times the trembling old Celt shrank cowering from her half-ferocious prisoner.

Such chanced to be the case the day after their interview on the rock, when the recognition concerning the meeting at the convent at Cadiz was mutually made. After that conversation Sir Guy was left to utter solitude. Wearily passed his time ; all the more so, perchance, because he felt an increasing desire for the society that was sometimes vouchsafed to him.

His sentry-like walk on the balcony was unimpeded; and, after a tiresome day, as he was taking his usual stroll there when the sun had set, his arm struck from the parapet to his foot a couple of books, left there evidently for his use: he found one was the translation of Ariosto by Master John Harrington; the other, a copy of the English Gospels.

"Thanks, gentle Hilda," he said, touching his lip to the name.

CHAPTER VI.

HARDLY had the grateful captive uttered the words, and performed the action attributed to him at the close of the last chapter, when the gentle Hilda he apostrophized stood before him. Sudden and light as an apparition she had come; her rather strange attire rendering more remarkable the unusual paleness of her face, on which the golden moonbeams directly fell. Behind her appeared the yellow-headed Celt.

“Sir Guy D’Esterre,” the lady said, in a voice that trembled either from haste or emotion, as she arrested the words which the eager looks of the young man told her were on his lip, “you mean to thank me for some small acts of courtesy or charity. I come to throw myself—ourselves—upon your honour or your clemency !”

He gazed upon her in silence, till her eyes fell before his. The conversation he had lately listened to on the rock soon enlightened him as to her real meaning. He advanced a step, and putting one knee to the ground, he took a cold and passive hand, and pressed his warm lips upon it.

"Speak, lady ; and, if it be to the death, depend on the honour, the truth, and—as far as in him lies—the service of Guy D'Esterre."

A slight cough spoke of an effort to clear away emotion, to which the girl he thus addressed was too proud to yield.

"I ask, sir knight," she answered, "but for your silence. My young cousin has told me you overheard our late discourse ; knowing such to be the case, I have been emboldened to take this step. I fear me we shall be betrayed by others, if not by you, and, to prevent that danger, I come as your warder to open your prison-door, and bid you depart."

"But only to return—a free man—but still"——

"Hush !" she whispered, in a tone so low that it seemed with difficulty the word was

breathed. "This is a serious moment—let no vain protestations, no idle language, pass between us. Sir Guy, you said you were ignorant of the name of him from whom you received your wound—that is my excuse—I would say my reason—for breaking your captivity. That person will be here by to-morrow's dawn; such ignorance might then be removed. At all events, after meeting him face to face in his own castle, your difficulties, if hereafter called on to witness against him, would be greater. Such considerations determine me, with whom he left you in ward, to act now without his knowledge or permission;—besides, he will be accompanied by one who is the deadly foe to the Saxons. This," she added, with increasing paleness, "I have but just learned. Now, sir knight, you know my reasons. In one hour all but ourselves and this faithful nurse of mine will be in secure repose. Hold yourself in readiness, then, on this spot, for our return."

"You trust me, lady?—say, Hilda, that you trust me!"

"With a brother's life," she responded, in

a low voice, bending over him as he again knelt before her,—“say, in return, shall I trust in vain?”

“The word of a D'Esterre is not lightly broken. I will be true to thee and thine. And here I solemnly swear”——

“Swear not,” she cried,—“a vow may not bind an honest man more than his simple word; and if thou art false, oaths may be so too.”

She drew a step or two back, and Sir Guy was again alone with the moon.

He wandered back to take a last look of his cell, for which he was surprised to feel now for the first time a certain sort of affection; a strange degree of regret mingling with the joy inspired by his unexpected deliverance. That sentiment was still more strongly experienced when the young man returned to the trysting-place, and looked over the scene which he had first beheld sparkling under the vivid rays of the rising sun—now lying cold and silent beneath the fading light of a retiring moon.

To melancholy he had been a stranger: something akin to that sensation began now

to be felt. On that rock, beneath the glorious sunlight, he had first seen the lovely face in actual presence, which had bent over his lowly couch of suffering, which he had thought of in half-waking dreams as that of a ministering angel, depicted to him by a distempered fancy. Might he ever again behold her, or that fair young thing, so early betrothed to one whose very life, it seemed, had so strangely been placed in his keeping?

Thus was he thinking when a light touch on his arm caused him to look round. A tall, slight form was beside him, shrouded in a thick frieze mantle, the hood of which hung over the face, so that Sir Guy was obliged to approach his closely in order to ascertain to whom it belonged,—so closely, indeed, that it was precipitately withdrawn some steps backward.

“No more words,” whispered in saddest tones the voice he had learned to know; “follow in silence, and tread softly if you can.”

The moon was bright, the whole scene visible. Noiseless and quick she glided along the battlements, and turned the corner to the side where she had forbidden him to go. A

minute more brought him to the opposite side, the western one of the keep ; and he perceived that it was a detached portion of a rather extensive fortress or castle, standing on another pile of rock adjoining the coast ; with which building it was connected by a strong drawbridge, so as to form it into a keep or place of safety and retreat ; the ascent of the precipitous rock being impossible, access to it was unattainable when the bridge was raised, and, in the absence of artillery, such a place had been one of considerable strength.

While these observations were being made, they passed the drawbridge, and descended the steps along the side of the rock at its other side, up which he had been carried by the herculean strength of the Irish chief. At their feet the wicker boat was lightly heaving in the tide ; within sat the old Celt, holding an oar in readiness. A sense of the ridiculous in being thus absolutely in the power of two women assailed Sir Guy ; and while it forced a smile from himself, he felt glad to think none of his comrades should know of his adventures.

“ Yet are we not all under the command

of a woman ?" was his consoling reflection ; "a woman, whose nod is as omnipotent as Jupiter's ; one who must be courted as a Venus, and dreaded as a Mars."

He had now reached the lowest step of the descent. At the water's edge stood his late warder, her light form loosely enveloped in the dark mantle that hung open around her, for the hands that had confined it were now crossed in an attitude of devotion upon her breast. She felt the gravity of the act she was engaged in ; she breathed a prayer that it might not be followed by suffering to her house. Her hood, falling a little backward, showed him a calm, yet somewhat anxious, face, beautiful in its piety. The young knight bowed his head, and, whatever might be the subject of her prayer, added to it a deep but inward Amen.

"Thou art free, sir knight," she said, in a low voice. "Keep to the right along the coast on landing ; the way is safe to the English camp."

"Leave me not, sweet Hilda ! I cannot leave thee thus at this hour alone on this wild rock. At least attend me to the shore."

She stepped silently into the boat: it was paddled off by Canna, and soon reached the land. Seeing her prisoner slow to depart, the young girl sprung on the shore, pointing out the road he was to pursue.

He stood beside her, yet lingered still.

"Come with me!" he suddenly cried. "Come—let me bear thee from a spot unfitting a being such as thou art. I will bear thee to one more suited to such youth and loveliness, to society more kindred to such gentleness!"

The hood fell back; the face was raised up to him with a look of such bewildered wonderment as that the child-like Isabel's might wear. The rising blood dyed for an instant her cheeks, her brow, and throat; but the next moment they were paler than before. A wonderfully speaking expression of bitter reproach, of keenly wounded feeling, and unutterable pain of heart, rapidly succeeded that simply inquiring gaze.

"Pardon, pardon!" cried Sir Guy, more eagerly. "Pardon the words that erred far more than my thoughts. Believe in me still;—retract not thy confidence. Hilda, believe

still in my truthfulness and honour : for, trust me, not thy brother, father, husband, would more tenderly shield and guard thee than would I. On the impulse of the moment I spake."

"Yet they say," she answered, with sadness, "that the Saxon race yields less readily to that impulse than do ours."

"It hath not been my wont to do so—as the noble, but rash Essex could well testify," was his rejoinder ; "and if I have yielded to it now, it was, in sooth, because my heart hath never been put to such proof before."

The hood fell again over the head.

"Say, only say, ere thou leavest me, that thou dost believe—wilt believe in me," he urged.

"I do ; I will. Christ and His help be with thee."

One light spring replaced her, almost as she spoke, in the wicker-boat : it moved off, and Sir Guy stood looking after it till the dark form that stood in it, with drooping head, grew more and more indistinct in the misty light, and finally seemed to blend with the gloom of the distance, and melt away in it.

“Thus, then, has the vision dissolved, not in light, but darkness,” he sighed: and, with a pang at his very heart, the notion of which would have been a matter of jest to him not a great many days before, the liberated captive turned from the gloomy sea-girt rocks, and took his way along the shore.

The wicker-boat moved on to the island rocks. The girl it bore had stood erect and calm till the figure standing on the shore she left became likewise invisible; then she dropped upon the bench, bowed her face in her hands, and wept. Pride might then give way.

CHAPTER VII.

THE youth of Guy D'Esterre had been happily spent: although left an orphan at an early age, he had been placed under the guardianship of his godfather, whose daughter was the wife of the noble Sir Philip Sidney, and thus experienced nothing of the neglect or danger which so often befalls unprotected boyhood. At an early age he took service under that chivalrous knight: he, as well as the young Earl of Essex, stood beside him when, while dying himself, he resigned his draught of water to the expiring soldier,—the action by which his name has become most popularly known.

Sir Guy had shared with Essex in the merit, if not in the glory, of taking Cadiz; and in the still greater merit of protecting

the women, the religious communities, and property of the town. A friendship had existed between them, which neither disparity of disposition, nor the regret and impatience with which D'Esterre beheld the noble spirit of the Earl held in subjugation to the extraordinary caprice, and stooping to minister to the singular vanity of his old Queen, could altogether change ; although, when united to the career of dissipation into which his own loss of self-esteem had drawn the latter, these circumstances had interrupted an intimacy that now was utterly suspended in consequence of Sir Guy's service in Ireland, to which country he had been sent with some of the best of the English troops who had been employed against Philip II. in the Low Countries.

Foreign service was sought for by the adventurous spirits of the age ; Essex had twice privately escaped from the bondage of his doting sovereign to share, contrary to her commands, in the dangers and glory of arms, instead of wasting youth and talents in the absurd and degrading mock courtship by which the royal favour of the

maiden Queen, of nearly twice his age, was won or secured to all aspirants.

Neither nature nor art had formed Guy for a courtier; above all, for one of his own epoch. He kept at a distance from the court of Elizabeth, whose fame was still dear to her army and navy, since they created it themselves; yet he had associated with some of the choice spirits who shed a lustre on the age, and who were the means of creating even a fictitious glory for her in the estimation of posterity, by the writings which handed her down to successive ages in the flattering portraits which she both drew of herself, and obliged all who approached her to draw of her.

But, whatever might have been the moral influence of the Elizabethan age, it was one outwardly too glorious in the annals of England not to serve the office of charity in the judgment of later times, and cover over the multitude of sins which eyes that penetrated deeper might espy beneath the exterior lustre.

Pity it was so foul a page as that which relates to the vexatious history of Ireland

should occur in annals to which Englishmen refer with pride. Sir Guy was not the only one of the military sent to that wretched land who bewailed his lot. Content, careless, and happy, with a fortune adequate to his wishes, and without other ambition than that of military distinction, he had never before been brought into connexion with such scenes of wretchedness, of moral turpitude, confusion, and debasement. In his own mind and character lingered a strong reflexion of the elder knight of the days of chivalry, to which nothing could be much more opposed than the service on which he was employed, and the people with whom he was connected.

The brief description given by Essex when he termed Ireland "the cursedest of all islands," is one that seems to have gained a sort of currency in the traditionary belief of successive ages. That island was then what it still is—an enigma among nations; and what it will probably continue to be until its people learn to look at home for the source of all the evils that afflict them. The Abbé Mac Geoghegan makes one true obser-

vation when, in writing the history of his country, he says: "The source of her destruction can be discovered in her own bosom." The whole history of Ireland is a tissue of civil discord; the natives, notwithstanding, make England their scapegoat, and, by casting on her broad shoulders all the odium that attaches to its past history or present state, get rid of the difficulty that embarrasses a thoughtful mind.

At this period, however, a new element of strife was admitted into that little kingdom, which was thenceforth to absorb, or envelop in its capacious folds, all other sources of discord,—combining them with itself, and being the form or pretext for all future civil broils. This was religion. Religion—holy, much profaned word—gave a new, a sadly perpetuated form to Irish discord, but it was far from having been the cause of producing it.

Internal discord invited the Anglo-Normans to Ireland; and from that time up to the one we write of, the chiefs and the people of the land were more engaged in fighting with each other than in fighting against the

English. Thus, a clerical historian of the Church of Rome in that land says : "The disputes between the Bishops of Waterford and Lismore, relative to Church property and tithes, during a great part of the thirteenth century, had given rise to much angry feeling and bloodshed." And another asserts that at this juncture two of the leading chiefs were too much engaged by their enmity against each other to care for religion or their country. The entire province of Ulster was desolated by a civil feud between O'Neil and his son, afterwards the great opponent of the English.

But from the later years of Queen Elizabeth's life, the Irish were to fight for religion; the Pope himself authorized them to do so, in his famous letter to Geraldine of Desmond, offering to all who fought for the true faith against Elizabeth the same privileges as were accorded to the Crusaders against the Turks. The fighting had been the same before, and was the same afterwards; but in the latter case, so far as England was concerned, religion became the watch-word of strife, though up to the date of

a few years within that of which we write, what were called "faction fights" exhibited the perpetuated spirit that had rent the land into detached atoms, under chiefs and leaders who each fought for himself, and each against the other, while all claimed to possess a common country, and then, a common faith.

Pope Adrian gave Ireland to Henry II., "for the reformation of its manners;" this, Roman Catholic historians now admit,* and the Irish fought against the zealous invaders; the invaders became in time most troublesome to their mother country; and, in the time of Queen Elizabeth, the Anglo-Norman names of the men most distinguished in those dreary wars proved, as they still do, a descent from the English people, whom they had learned to regard as another race.

The Abbé Mac Geoghegan denies the genuineness of Adrian's Bull, on the ground that it would be ridiculous to believe that the Pope had sent "ferocious" persons to

* See Brennan's "Ecclesiastical History."

reform the manners of "so civilized" a people as the Irish; but in a later part of that curious history he quotes the letter of Gregory XIII. to the famous Geraldine; and adds:—"Thus did Gregory XIII. endeavour to remedy the evils which had been inflicted on Ireland by Adrian IV., one of his predecessors. He wished, by separating that country from England, to repair the imprudence committed in bestowing it on Henry II., under the specious pretext of establishing the faith in it, and reforming the morals of its people. Gregory's plan, however, was too weak, and the evil too deeply rooted."*

The native Irish had fought against the Papal Crusaders who were sent by Pope Adrian to reform them, whom their historians accuse as bitterly as they do the English of later days; and now the descendants of those invaders no longer considered

* "History of Ireland," by the Abbé Mac Geoghegan, chap. xlii. See also chap. xv., wherein the author refutes, as an incredible absurdity, the "impudence" and "specious pretext" which he thus afterwards attributes to Pope Adrian IV.

themselves of the same stock as the English people they have learned to hate.

From this miserable era, however, a new element was infused into the spirit of animosity against England, that had from generation to generation passed into the breasts of the native, or, as the English styled them somewhat contemptuously—the mere Irish—from the time of the first invasion ; and the same spirit extended itself to the Anglo-Irish, who had made themselves, or been made by the English Government, lords of the soil. The spirit of faction that covers the page of Irish history with confusion and bloodshed became from this time gradually exchanged for, or identified with, the party spirit of politics and religion—a spirit that has never since been long suffered to repose in the land it seems to choose for its own, above all other nations of the earth.

At the period when the adventures of Sir Guy D'Esterre began in that western isle, a part of the view we have glanced at was still prospective ; that part of it which

was retrospective may be supposed to have mingled itself in the meditations which were not wholly given to another subject; one that, perhaps, possessed more interest for him, if not for his historian, as the released knight trod slowly the rocky line of coast along which an ill-formed road led to the fort then garrisoned by the English.

Truth to tell, his sensations of disgust at the moral debasement, ignorance, and destitution which met him on all sides in his new service, had been blended with a very large portion of indignation at the misconduct of his own countrymen. He had come too directly from foreign service to have understood beforehand the actual condition of the land he was sent to, or the extraordinary amount of embarrassment and annoyance it caused to his Queen and Government. His sentiments it were vain to record, since his contemporary, the tuneful author of the sweet "*Faërie Queen*," as well as the historian Camden, and many others, have left us descriptions and disquisitions enough. The victim at once of its own internal evils—the evils produced by the restless, turbulent,

revengeful disposition of its numerous petty chiefs, and their uncivilized, excitable dependants ; and of the changeful Government that adopted a policy sometimes weakly temporizing, at others cruelly unjust, and at all times too partial to new settlers—he saw a land, small indeed, but sufficiently fertile to supply the necessities of its inhabitants, presenting an unparalleled scene of poverty and woe ; the people barely recovered from the horrors of famine, caused by the fierce vengeance which had followed the rebellion of Desmond : the chiefs, in many cases, beset with spies and informers who misconstrued and misrepresented their designs or actions, and reported them either to the Government, or to persons whose pay they received for the information helped them to gain that which numberless adventurers came there to seek—an estate in the “cursedest of all islands.”

Revenge, the deadly and too generally the dominant passion of a native Irish character, found ample means of gratification ; and the treachery that would not be practised for gold was readily made subser-

vient to enmity, or employed for the repayment of injuries.

Religion had become a word of discord or of dread ; the people were in danger of altogether forgetting that it had any other significancy. For let controversialists on one side or the other say what they will, the impartial mind will work out between their contradictory statements this one obvious conclusion.

The melancholy aspect of the country was increased by the ruins of religious and charitable houses. The ravages caused by that rapacious monster, who, in some inscrutable mystery of Providence, was certainly the moving spring of the Reformation in England, were everywhere visible,—the consecrated property sold, the lands bestowed on a settler who became tributary to the arbitrary despot. The practice had not ended ; in the time of Elizabeth fresh confiscations were made, fresh robbery and wrong were practised. The ruins of those beautiful edifices erected by the Anglo-Normans after their settlement in Ireland still touchingly appeal to the heart ; and, alas ! that it should

be so!—serve a purpose directly the reverse of that they were intended for. They were built to promote charity—built in love to God and men. In men they perpetuate rancour; they stand silently witnessing to bygone wrong; and the homily they utter, even to the unlearned peasant's ear, incites not to peace and good-will with the destroyer.*

In addition to those more magnificent buildings left to ruin by the spoliation of Henry VIII., were now to be seen many parish churches, utterly desolate, unroofed, or dilapidated. This was not the work of violence so much as neglect: it is true that the natives, or their leaders (even that “dear son” of the Pope himself, the great O’Neil), did not scruple to rob or burn a church occasionally; but, this devastation apart, it was not wonderful that the churches should fall to decay, when there were neither priests to serve nor people to attend them.

* It is true that many of the ruins so numerous in Ireland are associated by the poor people with the name of Cromwell: a foe alike to them and us.

The Church of England was now established in England by the indomitable will of that true daughter of the Tudors, who would consign Puritan or Papist alike to the block or the scaffold, if the question of her supremacy were too boldly assailed by either. But in Ireland it was nearly powerless; at least, it was there, as it still is, in a militant state. All persons were by law compelled to go to its service in the parish churches; all other service was by law prohibited, and only performed when opportunity or circumstances were favourable; but even where people were disposed to obey the law, the state of the ordained but unregulated Church, on which their attendance was commanded under severe penalties, precluded their obedience. Most of the churches were left without priest or pastor; some, confided to the charge of men who had twice changed their forms or doctrines, in order to continue to "live by the altar," might naturally be regarded with aversion by the flock, to whom the shepherd who had obeyed both Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth might appear to be still of doubtful fidelity; and of others,

again, the benefices to which they belonged were bestowed as a recompense, or grant of favour, on some layman, who employed the lowest and poorest clerks who would perform their prescribed duties at the cheapest rate.

This practice, unhappily adopted even in England by the imperious head of the Church, was the cause of much and perpetuated evil: Elizabeth herself presented a living to the lay follower of a favourite courtier, just as a government office would be now disposed of; leaving him to provide his clerical substitute as he pleased.

It has been said that the poet Spenser described the state of Ireland in exaggerated terms, from a desire to please his sovereign by such a portrait of her enemies; but surely such a description maligns rather her own government, although it is corroborated by that of her Deputy, Sir Henry Sidney, whose statement was drawn from his own inspection, as he writes, "of each province, and almost each county thereof." The reformed Bishop of Meath, "a godly minister of the Gospel, and good servant of the Queen's

Highness," informed him that there were in his diocese very nearly the one-half of the parish churches thus situated, their lands or benefices being leased out to farmers, and a sorry curate appointed to serve them. Of 224 parish churches, the number of 105 were thus situated in the diocese of Meath alone: no vicar resident on any of them; and of the curates, only eighteen could speak English, which language had been substituted in Divine Service for the Latin. The others appear to have been priests of the old religion, as it was called; since, the livings being impropriated, they lived by the altar literally, or, as Sir Henry says, by "altarages," without having any one house standing for them to dwell in; in many parts the walls of the churches were down; the chancels of others unroofed.

Edmund Spenser adds his well-known dark picture to this sketch, showing the ground of the evils that left such seed in the Irish soil: "All Irish priests, who now enjoy church livings, are in a manner mere laymen, saving that they have taken holy orders; but otherwise they live as laymen do, following all kinds of husbandry, as other Irishmen do.

They neither read Scripture, nor preach to the people, nor administer Communion; but baptism they do, for they yet christen after the Popish fashion. Only they take tithes and offerings, and gather what fruit else they may of their livings." With such a *reformed* clergy, it followed as a necessity that most of the Bishops who ruled them were as bad. "Yea," saith the poet, "and some of them, whose dioceses are in remote parts, somewhat out of the world's eye, do not all bestow the benefices, that are in their donation, upon any, but keep them in their own hands, and set up their servants and horseboys to take up the tithes and fruits of them, with the which some of them purchase great lands, and build fair castles upon the same."

These disorders, and especially those arising from lay proprietors, produced a fruitful source of still enduring evil. The laws against recusants in force in Ireland as well as in England, were much more fruitless in the former land, where the natives clung to their religion with a zeal that had been awakened, and was now maintained, by the fact that it *now* formed a part in their

struggle against what was called the Saxon power. But little was done to create an inclination for the Reformation that was enforced, and much was done which tended to deepen and cherish an attachment to the faith that was proscribed.*

Even the clear head, strong mind, and indomitable will of Queen Elizabeth found Irish affairs a matter too perplexing and vexatious for their powers. The country, never yet wholly subdued, was still rather in a state of resistance to the power of the English than of rebellion against an acknowledged sovereign. Such a recognition had, even by the Irish Parliament, been only recently made, and that on the stipulation of an equal administration of English law, and equal freedom of its own Parliament; but one great bane of that unhappy country existed

* The Jesuit and historian Campion, whose zeal against Queen Elizabeth brought him to the scaffold, was *converted* to the Church of Rome in consequence of the dreadful abuses he witnessed in Ireland when he went there as one of the English missionaries, to teach the people the doctrines of the Reformation. Instead of converting them, he became a proselyte himself.

in the fact that each Lord Deputy, as its Governor was styled, had his own distinct Council, and ruled by means of it and his his own despotic authority,—imposing taxes and making decrees at his pleasure.

The English Government might have difficulties to contend with, from the wild, restless, and fiercely independent spirit of the chieftains and their followers; but the Anglo-Irish, or English settlers, were its greatest nuisance, and were found to be worse than what were termed “the mere Irish;” to the resemblance of whom some writers of the period complain that they soon degenerated.

The refuse of society was now swept over there; needy and base adventurers found in it a place of security where they might enrich themselves without much fear of provoking justice. Thus Perrot, the Queen’s half-brother, whom she afterwards condemned to death for contempt of her Majesty, wrote to her these words during his administration:—“I can please your Majesty’s Irish subjects better than I can the English, who, I fear me, will more shortly

learn the Irish customs than did the Jews those of the heathen."

Each Governor and military commander had his own adherents and friends to provide for; and on any symptom of disaffection being manifested by an Irish chief, his lands were not unfrequently promised beforehand to an English adventurer in the event of his breaking out into rebellion: so that it became the interest of those who wished to become "settlers" to foment disturbances, or magnify causes of suspicion. Needy and unprincipled men were often employed to excite impatient and fiery tempers, the effects of which would put such persons in possession of a coveted property. Suspicious circumstances were aggravated, or false accusations made: the cases were rare in which such conduct did not succeed in goading the victims into some act of resistance or retaliation, which was eagerly seized on as a plea for confiscation. When Elizabeth was informed of the Earl of Tyrone's inclination to take up arms, she answered: "If he does, there will be lands for those who want them."

On some occasions hostages were taken from the suspected chiefs, and confined in the English camp, or sent to London, where their lives would pay the forfeit of any want of submission to the demands made upon their families.

It was with some such circumstances as these that the events alluded to in the preceding chapters were connected,—an explanation of which was desirable before we follow our English knight on his return from the fortress of the Irish chief.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGER in the country in which he now was, and only recently from foreign service, the circumstances, before related, were so little known to Guy D'Esterre as to render him quite unapprehensive of encountering any difficulty in reporting the cause of his absence.

The account he gave of himself was simple as well as true. He had been wounded in the attack made on the party returning from the seizure of O'More's fortress: a friendly stranger had saved him from death, and on his recovery he had returned to his duty.

"And think you that tale will content our Lord Marshal?" said one of his comrades, to whom he first related it.

“For what purpose would you conceal the truth, Guy?” asked an elder one, who had been his friend from childhood. He had drawn him aside, and spoke in a low tone.

“Truth ! I know no truth to conceal, and I speak no falsehood,” he exclaimed aloud.

The answer made the younger men smile, and the old men look grave.

“In what thou sayest last, thou art right, boy,” he thoughtfully replied ; “ but strange tidings have been brought here before thee.”

“In what respect, good Anster, I pray you tell me, and show me, if you can, their author.”

“I can tell you what is said, but I cannot tell you who has said it, for if he is in the camp, he is kept close. It is said that you were assaulted by O'Connor of Fitzclare, whose loyalty has long been suspected ; and were detained in his stronghold, in durance vile, under the wardership of some giant of the Irishry in female form !”

“Durance vile !” interrupted the younger officer, “shame on the word ! Sir Guy looks as much confounded at hearing it as if his

fetters had been well nigh too soft to hold the doves of Venus."

"Silence!" cried the object of this pleasantry, with anger, which was prevented from any further explosion by the entrance of a messenger to summon him to the presence of the Lord Marshal, which title was now conferred on the Commander of the English forces in Ireland.

"Ho! Sir Guy, art safe escaped from the enemy's quarters?" said this personage, in a tone of cordiality. "We thought ere this thou wert still more securely lodged. We were preparing to go in search of thee with the dawn, and thou art come *apropos* to show us the way to this deceitful traitor's den."

"Pardon my dulness, my Lord Marshal; I know not of whom you speak; and as to escape, that affords small cause of congratulation, since I was despatched hither in friendliness, so soon as my unlucky wound was healed."

Sir Henry Bagnal, whose zeal in the service he was engaged in might be just then quickened by the indignation he felt at his

sister's marriage with the formidable O'Neil, eyed the speaker with a scrutinizing glance, which ended in a gaze of astonishment, real or feigned.

"Your detention was then a friendly one?" he said.

"I had reason to believe it was so."

"By whom were you detained?"

"I heard no name."

"You know by whom, notwithstanding."

"I know not to what this tends, my Lord Marshal. The circumstances that befell me I will relate. When my party was cut off by the clan of O'More, I received a wound on the head, which rendered me senseless. I know no more than that I was tended with charitable care, and allowed to depart when recovered."

"By whom were you so charitably tended?" asked Bagnal.

"By—an Irishwoman of the baser sort," said D'Esterre, reddening as he spoke; and the smile the answer caused made his angry blood to rise still higher.

"Sir Guy," said Bagnal, suddenly changing his sarcastic tone, "let us cease to jest. I sent for you, as in duty bound, to in-

quire into matters of which the Government of her Grace in this land must take cognizance. The man by whom you were, if not wounded, at least kept in confinement, is one, we have cause to believe, who has been already disaffected, and whose son is even now a hostage for his father's faith. It would speak ill for a loyalty that has never been tarnished, were Sir Guy D'Esterre to seek to conceal the name or to palliate the offence of this rebel."

A smile, more scornful than he wished it to be, was curling the young man's lip, but, repressing it, he bowed coldly, and answered,

"I have said all, Lord Marshal, that I have to say."

"But not all that it is necessary to say!" Bagnal, quivering with anger, responded. But, controlling his anger, he resumed the smoother tone in which he had before spoken.

"Did you not know, Sir Guy, that you were in the fortress of O'Connor of Fitzclare?"

"I did not," he answered, to his questioner's evident disappointment: for he knew

that the young knight's character would not allow him to appear suspicious of his truth.

"It is strange: yet it may have been that you heard not the name. The place of your late imprisonment, however, must be known to you, sir knight. You will guide us to it, and thus supply the proof we want of this fellow's dishonesty."

"I will not!" cried D'Esterre.

"Enough, Sir Guy; you will await, then, the orders of the Lord Deputy. Having by this token claimed our help to free you from that traitor, such a disobedience in the service of the Queen is all the more incomprehensible."

As he spoke, the Lord Marshal drew forth the ring that Sir Guy had unwittingly dropped from his prison window.

"That ring is mine," said D'Esterre, extending his hand to take the ring, which Bagnal was about to replace in a drawer.

"Your pardon, sir knight, having sent us this token, we must keep it to lay before the Lord Deputy as a proof of some facts which we find are not now to be remembered."

"Fool that I was!" cried the young man, impatiently, and, checking himself, added—

"Lord Marshal, on the honour of knight-hood, I never sent that ring to you, or claimed your help by such a token."

"To whom, then, did you send it?" asked Bagnal.

"How it came into your possession is a question I would rather have answered," returned the other, with some haughtiness.

"Seeing that it is your property, you have a right to such an answer," said the Lord Marshal. "The injury you suffered, Sir Guy, it seems, still affects your memory. We must remind you, therefore, that on the evening of that day when you had made a somewhat rash attempt to escape by throwing yourself from the battlement of your prison tower, a friend of ours, suspecting you were there detained against your will, desired you, if you wished for the help of your friends, to send some token of such desire. You dropped this ring in reply, which was forthwith conveyed to us; and the help it solicited should have been sent sooner but for our attendance at the Council of the Lord Deputy. Does Sir Guy D'Esterre now recall this occurrence; or does he still deny having sent this signet?"

“ Sir Guy D'Esterre recalls the occurrence; but denies, and will deny, all thought of sending that ring here, or of asking the Lord Marshal's help by it,” he answered with his former haughtiness; and, bowing to his interrogator, drew back some steps to signify that his part was ended.

Bagnal, calling an officer of the guard, delivered his orders respecting him, and D'Esterre, at once mortified and indignant, left his presence.

Almost at the same time another interview was taking place between two men who were profoundly interested in the issue of the English knight's adventure—one, from the long-cherished and ever-burning thirst for revenge,—the passion so deeply seated in an Irish heart; the other, from the prospect it opened to him of becoming enriched by the ruin of the chief whom his confederate had vowed to destroy. Both rejoiced in the unexpected accident that facilitated such designs; each would rejoice if the project of the other were disappointed; for each used his confederate for his own ends. Symonds, a needy adventurer, who cared not in what

land or in what way he sought his fortune, was now a creature of the Lord Marshal's, to whom he rendered himself useful as well as subservient; while he had so far obtained his confidence as to secure the adoption of the schemes which his own self-interest, or the vengeance-seeking mind of his associate, suggested.

About midway between the English camp and the fortress of Fitzclare, one of these men sat on a ledge of rock, looking thoughtfully over the sea, whose waves alone broke the stillness of the wild and dreary coast. This man was Lawrence, the person formerly mentioned as being one of the followers or retainers of that chief. He saw the approach of Symonds, whom he had waited for, but would not notice him until he came beside him and spoke; then, without changing his posture, he answered with a negligence amounting to scorn. Detesting his associate in evil, the solitary pleasure he allowed himself in his pursuit of vengeance was that of tantalizing and terrifying him.

"Thou hast seen the Lord Marshal?" said Symonds, speaking as if he feared the rocks and waves might overhear him.

"Yes, and thy other fair countryman, the young gallant we had of late among us."

"What! hath he, then, got away?"

"He hath been sent away," returned Lawrence, still looking over the sea.

"Dismissed!—how?—not by Fitzclare?"

"No."

"Ha! that is well; so that the act were not his own voluntary one, it matters not by whom it were done."

"Thou thinkest so?"

"Dotard! speak out, and say what is to be said at once. By whom was this young knight released?"

"By the Lady Hilda Fitzclare," said Lawrence, without the least change of look or posture.

The fierce exclamation that burst from the quivering lip of his hearer gave him the happy consciousness of his success in displeasing him.

"Thy tale was true, then?"

"True. Hilda Fitzclare can be won by one Saxon, though she rejects another."

But the man he spoke to was more deceitful than himself.

"If such be the case, good Lawrence, methinks our chase is up," he said, with resumed calmness, or rather with an assumption of carelessness. "I, at least, shall follow such scent no longer."

A scowl of suppressed wrath overspread the gloomy brow of the man he addressed. He could not, without the influence of the man he despised, work out the end he had in view.

"Wherefore question me on love matters?" he exclaimed. "What has one like me to do with love? Ill might I understand its signs, who have known no love save"—He stopped; the memory of some past affection changed for an instant the expression of his countenance; it was a momentary light on that dark ground—"soon hatred settled in its place."

"Proceed in your own way," he added, gloomily, "and I will proceed in mine. But I tell you, Master Symonds, that never while he lives will Fitzclare give his daughter to one of Saxon race."

"He may soon be powerless to give or to keep her," said Symonds. "He has long

been a baited beast ; were he but to turn and try his tusks, we should soon pull him down."

He smiled, and Lawrence frowned more darkly.

"For that purpose," the latter added, "the young chief must be taken out of the way : as long as he is a hostage, the father will do nothing."

"His father has broken faith already," Symonds replied ; "the Lord Marshal must deal with his hostage."

"In that case the rest is easy. The O'Connor's lands are yours."

"Not all ; you shall have a share, worthy Lawrence. That I have promised."

"Pooh !" muttered the other, rising on his short legs, and seeming suddenly to decrease to the stature of a boy, "I fear not that the time will come when our accounts shall be justly settled !"

CHAPTER IX.

HILDA, accompanied by her Celtic nurse, strolled slowly down the rocky shore. The uncleared woods, bogs, and morasses, rendered the interior of their island fatal to the English troops; but the coast was not without a wild, though melancholy sort of beauty, not out of unison with the character of its natives. The evening sun, which was descending on the waters, and leaving the land in soft and saddened shade, while it added a charm to the scenery, increased also its melancholy tendency.

The well-contrasted pair who slowly wound along the rocky path might seem to share in its influence. The old woman, with arms folded in her ugly mantle, and head bent downward, walked silently beside

her young companion, who, by established usage, was at once her child and her mistress—governed while governing—or, in her own idea, doing so.

“A desperate case, Canna, requires desperate measures,” the latter was saying; “my father thought not of the results when he brought the Saxon knight to die, as he believed, a Christian death within his walls. The fact was known to us alone; your care restored him.”

“Mine!” muttered the nurse. “St. Patrick be good to us! It was she herself: he might have died like a heathen for what I cared!”

“Your skill in healing, nurse dear, is a second nature to you now; you cannot help it,” the other, with a rather sly smile, made answer. “Then, when he became impatient of restraint”—

“That was only when he could not get me to speak to him,” the old woman again interrupted. “He was tame enough when he talked with you and Isabel.”

“When he became impatient of restraint,” said Hilda, resuming her speech without

appearing to have heard this interposition, "it was evident that his detention must become known, and bring ruin upon our house: it was then that we decided it were better to trust to his honour, and let him go free before my father returned from his journey, accompanied by a man by whom Saxon blood would be shed with horrid satisfaction."

"And small wonder that it were! The youth was a brave-looking one for a Saxon, and honest-looking, too, though he does serve the hag;* but if the blessed saints heard my prayers, there is not one of his tribe who would not have sunk in the depth of the sea before ever he set foot on our land. But you trust this youth, my darling, and his heart must be blacker even than the rest of them if he betrays you."

"I do; I will," said Hilda, in a low voice, repeating the words she had used to Sir Guy.

As she spoke, an abrupt turn round

* The wars of Elizabeth in Ireland were called "The Hag's Wars."

some rocks placed them at once before Lawrence, who was returning from his expedition to the camp, and his meeting with Symonds.

"Where have you been?" cried his lady, with a sense of mistrust.

"At the Saxon camp," he answered, meeting the gaze of her clear deep eyes, and letting his own only slowly sink beneath it.

The readiness and truth of his answer made her repent of the misgiving that had crossed her mind. Whatever might have been the cause of his visit there, it could not have been connected, she thought, with treachery to his lord.

"And for what purpose, I pray you?"

Lawrence was silent: but looked at her with such a countenance as declared him to be the herald of evil tidings.

"My brother!—speak!" she cried.

"The young chief," he answered, relieved by the direction her thoughts had flowed in, "is said to be in good health."

"And in safety?" she rejoined.

"In safety for the present," said Lawrence, who by this time saw his way out of an unexpected embarrassment.

"What then took you to the Saxon camp?—or what tidings dost thou bring?—for, surely, man, they are not of good."

"Lady," he answered slowly, "yester-morn at dawn I sat among yonder rocks, as it is sometimes my wont to do."

A crimson colour flashed over Hilda's face, and in a moment left it pale as death. His dark, deep-set eyes seemed to gloat on that confused and terrified expression. Involuntarily she pressed her hands tightly together, as she forced the trembling inquiry—

"Well!"

His eyes dropped down, and did not rise once till the following speech:—

"I saw a Saxon soldier spying O'Connor's fort: he stood just at yonder point, from whence it can be seen or examined either for the first or last time before you turn off from the shore. I followed him, for I feared his purpose was not good; he returned to the camp, and I went thither also, and heard the base and lying tale that he reported. It were sin to vex your ear with it."

"Speak on," she said, with a sickening

faintness at her heart, and resting one hand on the shoulder of the nurse.

“This caitiff, whom I had taken for a simple soldier, proved to be a gay knight, named Sir Guy D'Esterre. He accused one, whom he named a rebel chief, of wounding and detaining him prisoner in his fort, guarded by two women of the Irishry, one of whom he described as old, ugly, yellow-haired, and yellow-faced; the other”—

At that moment the speaker lifted his downcast eyelids. The face that met his glance produced a change even on his dark countenance. It was pale as death: deep pain seemed to have entered the heart, but the features were at rest; even the usually speaking eyes had lost their expressiveness, as if some strange thing, unknown, unseen before, had suddenly come before their vision, and chilled and changed the soul that had beamed through them.

Lawrence stopped; in all men in whom the vestige of God's work remains, there is some remnant of good: he felt he was doing what the laws of the children of Israel forbade,—seething the kid in its mother's milk.

"Say on," said Hilda, in a low, but firm voice. "Did that knight tell how he had left the fort?"

The question, undesignedly put, confused the traitor, for of this circumstance he was ignorant, having been on his road before D'Esterre. He had really seen him standing in the position he described, to take a last survey of the singular fortress which, unconsciously almost to himself, had been the means of creating a new and deep interest in his breast.

The deceiver is easily deceived; a true heart and firm faith will more quickly discover the absence of a kindred spirit. A light came to Hilda's eye—a light that it was almost terrible to see as it fell down on the graceless form before her.

"Blessed Heaven!" she exclaimed, "can it be?—is truth, the virtue our forefathers boasted,—the virtue savage heathen possess, banished from this miserable land?"

Lawrence blinked, like a man abruptly meeting a sunbeam striking on his darkness; a murky flush tinged the dark pallor of his face. There were reproach, sorrow,

almost a sense of shame in her tone, far more than anger or contempt.

Fortunately for the traitor, the old nurse, whose perceptions were more cloudy, interfered—very unintentionally, for with a sort of animal instinct she detested him in her heart—to deliver him from the awkwardness of a half-convicted falsehood.

“He has told on us!” she cried, “the false-spoken knave! He will destroy us all now. The holy saints defend us!—didn’t I say this would come of our letting him go, and the O’Connor away?”

“I only tell the tale I have heard,” said Lawrence, in an offended manner. “They say that same knave is to appear shortly at the Council of the Lord Deputy in Dublin, to give account of these matters. I was fain not to answer the question the Lady Hilda put to me touching the manner in which he left the fortress: she loves not to hear falsehood, and such untrue and dishonouring words are not for her ear. He had, belike, heard many a goodly tale of captive knights set free by the fair dames whose favour they had won, and spoke but idly of an adventure that had not chanced.”

Hilda turned away ; she walked aside for a minute or two among the rocks, and then came back to Lawrence. A deep colour burned in her face ; it alone told of the emotions of pride, anger, and some sensation—the bitterest of all—that worked within her heart, while externally she was calm. Looking him fully in the face, she said—

“I fear not that the lady of whom thou speakest shall ever know dishonour, though it may be her lot to suffer from falsehood ; if wrong be done to her, she need not blush if she have done right. Better to be betrayed than the betrayer. Lawrence, the true heart would fain not suspect untruth : I know of no cause that could lead thee to act dishonestly in this matter ; did I doubt thee, it were vain to give thee this command. I charge thee, then, on thy allegiance, say not a word, drop not a hint, of aught of this in the hall or elsewhere. Be silent.”

The man made an awkward bow of assent ; but soon added—

“I obey, lady ; but should not the chief know of the danger that may threaten him, and be prepared to meet it ?”

She pressed her hand to her forehead, and bowed her head.

"I will confer with him ; do thou be silent," she said, lifting her head with an air of command that agreed better with her form and aspect than it did with her circumstances.

To know that she did so, Lawrence silently resolved ; for as without D'Esterre's evidence against him, proceedings were not likely to be taken against Fitzclare, it was necessary to their scheme that he should be urged by apprehension of the threatened danger to form some alliance with declared rebels ; or to take some other step that was contrary to the ever-changing and ill-understood laws of the English Council, which acted independently, and often in defiance, of the Irish Parliament,—such as would afford the pretexts which his enemies had so long sought for to complete his ruin.

He was not long in suspense. Too well did he know Hilda Fitzclare to suspect that fear of his displeasure would tempt her to conceal from her father aught which she believed it was his interest to know ;

but he doubted whether such a clear-judging mind as her's might not believe that his safety was more promoted by his ignorance of threatening danger than by his foreknowledge of it. Such, on another occasion, would have been her decision ; but now, a sentiment, concealed even from herself, led her to shrink from the idea of keeping their late prisoner's conduct a secret from her father ; and, while Lawrence was still meditating on the probabilities of her conduct, the opportunity of ascertaining it was afforded.

The large figure and somewhat solemn step of the Irish chief were already observable, slowly progressing towards them along the shore. His daughter went on to meet him. Her steps, at first quick and impulsive, slackened and became irregular as she advanced, grew unsteady as she approached him, until, as she drew near, she tottered with extended arms like a failing infant to meet his, and, with a low moan of inward pain, sunk on his broad chest.

Her face was hidden by the long locks which, in defiance of the English laws against

them, her father continued to wear. His head was bent over her ; his arms, with a tenderness wholly out of unison with his aspect, gently encircled her.

"Mavourneen, what aileth thee? Who hath alarmed thee?"

"Believe him not, my father,—trust him not ; he is false !—Lawrence is false !—the world itself is false !" she murmured, as if incoherently.

He raised her face between his large hands, and held it up to his.

"Of whom does Lawrence speak?"

"Of the Saxon—the prisoner—the soldier we released."

"WE!" With a hasty movement Fitzclare had shaken her from him ; with a second impulse he drew her again to his side. "Be it so, my child,—*we* released him. Yes, O'Connor's honour was saved by his child, and she will let him have the merit of her act."

"Mock me not, father !—You would not have sacrificed that honour by the death of the stranger to whom you had given refuge. It was not you I feared, it was

that fierce and angry man who was to have been your guest—our Isabel's uncle : who, for her sake and Morven's, would have been loath to let him go free."

"He has, then, broken his word ?—on his doing so we might reckon, since he is a Saxon."

O'Connor said no more, but, striding towards Lawrence, desired him to repeat the intelligence he saw he had just given to his daughter.

With some surprise Hilda listened to an account given by him of D'Esterre's conduct, in which she had little or no part ; an account which, in fact, simply detailed the event of which his lord was already conscious—the knight's having been assaulted, wounded, and kept in imprisonment by O'Connor of Fitzclare.

"And Morven—my son ?" cried the chief, impatiently, cutting him short.

"They talk of sending him forthwith to London ; they say the O'Neil will break forth again, and the hostages will be in safer keeping in a place they call the—"

"Tower"—added Fitzclare. "Verily,

Elizabeth's headsman has a hard service. Well, we can only trouble him twice more."

And, with a speech that showed but little of his stormy emotions, he turned from the others, and with long strides reached the landing-place of his fortress, where he was soon standing erect in the wicker boat; his long hair blowing out on the breeze that was now gloomily sweeping the water, and his strange dress and immense size looking still stranger and larger in the deepening twilight.

His daughter stood some minutes silently looking on the dark face of the man before her.

"Lawrence," said she then, in a voice more full of sadness than anger, "to suspect is hateful, and to mistrust is bitter where trust has once been placed. Spies and informers are plenty in this injured land. Canst thou have been amongst them?"

He did not reply directly to the question, but answered—

"I have not been with that Saxon in whom the Lady Hilda placed her fullest trust, and of whom, belike, she now speaks."

Stung by the tone and the words he uttered, she exclaimed—

“Man!—the knight of whom thou speakest, and whom in my heart I trow thou slanderest, knew not the name of thy lord; and yet but now I heard thee say he had accused O'Connor of Fitzclare!”

“Truly I myself heard not the name mentioned,” he answered readily, “save by Master Symonds, and others also, to whom the fortress and person of the O'Connor and—and—of the Lady Hilda, might have been, perchance, only guessed at from some description they had heard. It may, then, be but a report, the truth or falsehood of which a coming day will make plain.”

The last supposition was uttered in a manner that left no doubt of the speaker's belief as to the perilous nature, to the Fitzclares, of the day to which he had alluded.

“Poor nurse! thou at least wilt be true to me!” sighed the girl, as she felt the old woman assisting her tottering steps along the beach. Her hand was kissed.

“Keep a good heart, child,” said the nurse ; “I love not the Saxons, and would as lief that bold youth were in the bottom of the sea as where he is ; but for all that I like not that dark-faced Lawrence. The O’Neil, they say, will rise again ; and, with the help of God, he will drive out the strangers, just as the blessed Patrick drove the venomous reptiles into the sea.”

And, thus comforting her child, she approached with her the island rock, on a ledge of which they saw the childlike little Isabel dancing merrily to her own shadow, her fair hair flung wildly round her glowing face.

“To blight that young heart, to wither its glad spring-time—shall that be given me to do ?” was her cousin’s anxious and sorrowful thought.

CHAPTER X.

THE council-room of the Castle of Dublin was more than usually filled—for many petitions, complaints, and much harassing intelligence, were at that moment confusing and irritating the Lord Deputy, and, through him, his Queen.

With a few military acquaintances Guy D'Esterre loitered in a window, feeling some anxiety, and a good deal of impatience, to learn the result of the unpleasant but not uncommon charge that was laid against him, of forming an alliance with a suspected traitor or rebel of the Irish. His companions, finding him determined not to say more than he had already said on that subject, were now amusing themselves by remarking the proceedings that went on,

and laughing at the awkward movements of the old natives, as they walked about in the English dress which, in compliance with the desire of Sir John Perrot, a late Governor of their wretched country, they had assumed.

Peter of Russia was not more earnest in cropping the beards and changing the attire of his subjects, than were the rulers of Ireland in the same. The bard of that country has alluded to this in one of his melodies, in which the lady promises to fly with her "cooleen,"—

"Nor dread that the false-hearted Saxon shall tear
One string from his harp, nor one lock from his hair."

And the wisdom of this alteration might be apparent in the subdued aspect of the men who had submitted to it. With this approximation to foreigners, the old Irish lords appeared to bear about a badge of servitude, and to lose the independent and usually fierce demeanour that had characterized them.

Some commotion in the ante-room drew the attention of the young observers towards

it. A man of striking appearance was passing in : a splendid person, an open intelligent countenance, a bold and free carriage, blended with something of English or courtly grace, distinguished the celebrated chieftain, called by his countrymen The O'Neil, and by the English the Earl of Tyrone. His dress, too, united the ancient Irish with the English mode, the fully plaited yellow shirt, and cherished "cooleen" being still retained. It was thus he visited the Court of Queen Elizabeth, and was well received by her, although doomed to harass and embitter the painful latter end of her life.

On the present occasion he wore, as he usually did, a light frock of mail ; and carried his helmet in his hand, as he entered the room with the step and bearing of an independent prince.

A murmur of surprise at the boldness of this suspected chief thus presenting himself at the Court of the Lord Deputy, ran almost audibly through the room.

D'Esterre inquired who he was.

"Know you not the Earl of Tyrone?"

replied a weak-minded young officer at his side,—“her Grace knows him but too well—the famous rebel whom our Lord Marshal watches so close.”

“For what cause, if he is quiet now?” said the other. “Surely, were he devising treason, he would not thus walk into the lion’s den?”

Opinion concerning this chief, whose conduct was of dubious interpretation, was divided.

“Nay,” observed another, “he has broad lands, and some bold castles, and took a wife to boot, who was sister to the Lord Marshal, and that without asking his leave. He will make us work soon, I doubt not.”

“His marriage, methinks, was treason enough,” said D’Esterre, smiling; “but let us cease this talk, lest it lead us all to walk through the Traitor’s Gate.”

“And you would go through it alone, Guy, it seems?—you will do so if you do not speak out. Have a care, boy, for they have been discussing thy matter,” said his old friend.

“That could hardly be,” said D’Esterre

reddening; "slight offences, Heaven knows, are grievously punished: but I have been guilty of none."

He spoke uneasily; but, as he did so, the Lord Deputy was seen advancing to meet his unexpected visitor. He stood with O'Neil near the council-table, and, after a brief discourse, an officer, joining the group of which D'Esterre made one, gave them an account of what had passed.

"The Lord Deputy is right content," he said; "Tyrone has made his just dealing, as the Scripture saith, clear as the day. He avows his loyalty and his desire to abide by the terms he made with the Government; and lays all the blame of what has been otherwise reported on the late Deputy. He explains his absence from this Court by saying he was obliged to retire while Fitzwilliam governed, by whom his conduct was unjustly misrepresented; and from whose Government he could obtain neither proof of false charges nor satisfaction for wrongs. He wishes to be on friendly terms with our present Deputy, and is ready, he says, to prove that the Queen hath no more faithful

subject than he, if justice only be done to him, and the petitions of the Parliament be heard. The Deputy already sees he has reason; his boldness has won the day."

The speaker drew back with a salute, for the Lord Marshal just then came in, and went straight to the council-board. He started at seeing the object of his fierce personal animosity in apparent friendly conference with the new Lord Deputy. The two men looked at each other sternly and silently: O'Neil's gaze seemed to say his opponent was known, and would be braved. Bagnal's expressed hatred, and a scarcely hidden thirst for revenge; O'Neil would not withdraw that gaze; but Bagnal, turning aside to the Lord Deputy, desired to speak to him alone.

As they withdrew, the Earl retired to a little distance, and remained leaning by one of the pillars, with a changed and cloudy aspect, until the others returned from a conference which had evidently effected an equal change in the manner and conduct of the Lord Deputy towards him.

"There!" said the old officer who had

before spoken, "there is a brave turn in affairs—see now the stability of court favour: but late that Earl was our good friend Tyrone; now it needs but a few whispers in private, and the question is, whether he shall be detained here in durance, or suffered to depart to work us mischief. The Lord Marshal is fain to secure the prey; but the Deputy thinks shame of such a measure. See! he dismisses him briefly and scornfully. There he goes—our offered friend converted into a steady foe. We shall hear of this ere long."

"A man so suspected could not, methinks, be received to favour," said the young officer, as O'Neil, with a singularly altered aspect, left the audience-chamber.

"The Council," returned the other, "should either rely on the protestations a man makes, or not leave it in his power to break them. Where is the use of outraging that brave lord's feelings, and then sending him forth free to vent his angry passions in the way he would not have, perhaps, chosen if he were not driven to it?"

A summons to Sir Guy D'Esterre ended the discussion. The coldness with which he was received told him his case was already

prejudged by the Deputy and his Council. His answers were considered as evasive and unsatisfactory; his refusal to point out the fortress wherein he had been confined was sheer disobedience. He received the ungrateful intelligence that the case would be referred to the Queen, and that in the meantime his services in Ireland were dispensed with, and he must remain in arrest till he was conveyed to London.

At that epoch of the sixteenth century such an intimation might convey to our young hero the disagreeable prospect of languishing out half his years in the historically dishonoured Tower of London, if some angry humour of the "maiden Queen" had once consigned him to it; with the further prospect of having his head chopped off, in case any fresh trouble given by the Irish rebels should appear to implicate him more deeply. Of the chief, O'Connor of Fitzclare, he knew literally nothing; his loyalty or disloyalty was to him alike hypothetical; but in his fidelity or on his rebellion, Sir Guy, rather uncomfortably, felt his own fate most probably depended.

* * * * *

“Hilda, of the beautiful face and sweetly-speaking eyes, it had been, perhaps, as well for me—for thee, poor girl, far better—had I never seen thee !”

Such was the reflection, not altogether consolatory, that crossed a mind, until then too provoked and irritated to feel distressed, as Guy D'Esterre beheld the shores of unhappy Ireland recede from his view, while he stood on the deck of the ship that bore him from them ; and, distasteful as his service in Ireland had been, felt a burning pang of indignation at quitting it with a slur on the name and on the fame that had hitherto been unstained. The reflection was probably deepened, rendered more affirmative, when, on unhappily reaching London at a moment when his friend Essex was “keeping his chamber” in consequence of a quarrel with his petulant old lady-love, the officer who was reported to her as having taken part with her vexatious Irish was, without further ceremony, ordered to the Marshalsea.

“So far, so good,” thought Sir Guy, hopefully, as he stepped into the boat on the Thames : “it is not to the Tower, and the sickness of Essex never lasts long.”

The prison at that moment was well filled: the keeper, understanding the new guest came from Ireland, and was imprisoned for a slight offence, offered him the companionship of one from the same country; and Guy D'Esterre was conducted to a chamber already tenanted by a youth whose appearance at once excited his interest. He was seated on the floor, perhaps simply for change of posture; his long, lithe, active-looking limbs stretched languidly out, and bent back at the knees; his arm rested on the stool he should have sat on, and his head on it; the long locks hung negligently down. The newcomer steadfastly regarded him; and the longer he looked, the stronger became the idea which at first sight had occurred to him. The eyes were black, vivid, excited almost to wildness, or rapidly changing to gloom.

"Hers," thought Sir Guy, "are deep blue; changeful indeed, but still full of a calm, soul-breathing sweetness: his hair is brown, hers a raven black; her complexion is lily-white, his is like the mellow peach. Yet surely," he said, gliding his thoughts into words, and speaking aloud, "surely it is the brother of——"

"Of whom? I pray you," said the youth, rising and speaking in a manner that left no doubt of his nation.

"I cry you pardon," the other hastily replied; "I was struck by a likeness which may be but in fancy; tell me, I pray you, is your name Morven?"

"Morven O'Connor of Fitzclare," the youth replied; "imprisoned here as hostage for his father's faith, on the charge of a caitiff Saxon knight they style Sir Guy D'Esterre," was the haughty answer.

Sir Guy reddened and grew pale in the same instant.

"Young man, I would tell thee thou liest in thy throat, could I but prove my words with my sword against thine: as it is with us both, say what thou hast against Guy D'Esterre, for he is here to answer thee."

The youth regarded him in a sort of stupified surprise. The countenance rather than the words of the speaker convinced him he had been in error.

"That Symonds," he murmured, "is a false-hearted knave—that I always sus-

pected. Most likely he had some scheme in view when he told me that lying tale."

"Sir knight," he added, "tell me if you know a lady that is styled Hilda of Fitzclare, and what of her?"

"I know a lady whose name is Hilda," he answered, "her other titles I am ignorant of: for the rest I know only that to me she seemed as good and noble in mind as in person she is lovely!"

Morven frowned,—whether in reality displeased, or the better to conceal or conquer the emotion of pleasure which it is not impossible he felt, might be doubtful.

"Wherefore are you a prisoner here, sir knight?"

"For being true to thy"—he was about to say "sister," but he corrected his speech; "for being true to thee and to thy house."

"Fidelity," rejoined the young man, "is a virtue so little known between your nation and mine, that you should pardon me, Sir Guy, if I be somewhat anxious to know the cause of its being shown by you?"

"You owe me no obligation," said D'Es-

terre, perceiving a sort of reluctance on his companion's part to feel that he had been laid under one so great as his own speech had implied, and by a man who was still a stranger. "You owe me no obligation," he said; "I but scantily fulfilled the terms, or rather, I would say, I but scantily returned the good-will shown to me."

He then briefly related the leading circumstances of his misadventure with the father of his present prison companion.

When he had ended the narrative, Morven grasped his hand with the warmth of an excitable and sensitive nature.

"We must be comrades, but we shall voluntarily be friends," he cried.

"I trust so," answered D'Esterre, smilingly; "this dreary place would be worse than the wild beast's den were we to be foes."

CHAPTER XI.

THE incident that had attended his entrance within the prison walls tended for some days to direct D'Esterre's mind from a consideration of his circumstances. In spite of the resolution he had entered into with himself, to subdue the interest he had felt for his late fair warder, he found himself frequently suggesting some topic which led his communicative companion to dilate freely on the events of his family history.

"It seems to me that your father has not had justice done him?" he observed on one occasion.

"He has to deal with Saxons," the youth briefly replied,—as if the simple fact he asserted were reason sufficient to give.

D'Esterre smiled, but not pleasantly.

"Are all your family—I would say all your nation—alike prejudiced?"

"All who have not been bought over."

"Yet you but lately offered me your friendship!"

"I forgot you were one of them," said the young man, laughing; "no matter, you shall have it while we are caged together: if ever our wings are given to us again, we can decide which way we shall fly. Know you, Sir Guy, for what cause I am here?"

"I have heard it said you had been taken as hostage for your father's faith."

"Say, rather, as heir of my father's house—the last of his race," said Morven, bitterly. "Shall I relate a part of his history, to help to wile away these dreary hours?"

D'Esterre willingly assented; adding that he was aware that crying complaints daily were brought to the Queen concerning the fearful state of affairs in Ireland.

"Truly," he said, "they are a tangled skein, which even our strong-witted lady cannot unravel. She would deal equal-handed justice to all, were her ability as large as her will."

"Of which your own case is a fair proof?" said the other, somewhat scoffingly.

"Appearances were against me; and, moreover, that case was never fully laid before her Highness."

"An evidence, at least, of the misrule permitted among us."

"That there is misrule, is admitted too generally to be denied," returned D'Esterre; "but, methinks, no rule would content the Irishry so long as they might not rule themselves after their own wild fashion."

Morven started on his feet, flinging back his long hair, and, with a wild flash of his dark eyes, he cried—

"Saxon, I tell thee to thy face, that could I see my country what our bards tell us it once was, I would the next moment give not my heart's blood alone, but die fifty deaths if I could!"

"It is well if walls have not ears, good friend, or your words would not help to clear your way out of these."

"But think not," added the youth, "that all my countrymen share such sentiments as these. No; there are cooler heads than

mine, and all the majority of them wish for is fair and equal rule, with liberty to be governed by their own lawful Parliament, instead of by the ever-changing acts and laws of the English Deputy's Council. It is for this the O'Neil contends ; how can two Councils almost always opposed to each other do aught but embroil the land, and distract and ruin its people?"

"Truth to say, good youth," said D'Es-terre, warily, "I vex not my brain with politics; it seems to me that in your most wretched land they act as the troubled sea, whose waves cast up mire and dirt. I have served the Queen as a soldier hitherto, with some honour. The name of Elizabeth is glorious in the world. Shame and sorrow it is that one little island of her own dominions should be the one dark spot in the crown of her fame!"

"*One!*" muttered Morven, with emphasis, but, not wishing to provoke his more loyal companion, he added—

"Not to Elizabeth alone do I ascribe all the shame and sorrow which ought justly to darken the history of your land, Sir Guy,

in connexion with its government of mine. The acts of the late Queen, though she was of our faith, and re-established that faith for us, were in some instances almost as bad ; and with the reign of Mary began the misfortunes and wrongs of our house."

"Of which you engaged to tell me," said D'Esterre, "and, mayhap, from the relation I may gain some more knowledge of the state of affairs in your land than I have yet cared to learn."

"My father, Sir Guy, I need not tell you, is the descendant of that unfortunate monarch who first invited the Saxons, under the second King Henry, to our shore—"

"Say, rather, the Normans," interrupted D'Esterre, "for if you speak of lineage, I myself am of Norman, not of Saxon race."

"In our own language we call your nation Saxon ; but I will term you English, if it please you better," returned Morven, as he resumed his narrative.

"My father is the descendant of the last Irish king, Roderick O'Connor. In the time of Queen Mary the two districts, now named after her and her husband, Philip

of Spain, the King's and Queen's Counties, were the territories of O'Connor and O'More. O'Connor was my grandfather ; my father married O'More's daughter. Both these counties were taken possession of by the orders of Mary of England : the chiefs were seized, thrown into prison, and deprived of their possessions : their territories were, as it is termed, 'settled' by the English ; that is, they were made over in grants to English settlers, and their names will probably perpetuate their history. When released, or, rather, turned out of prison, the names of the O'More and O'Connor become foremost among the firebrands of their country. Their former people, or the inferior chiefs, who had been also dispossessed of their lands, appealed in vain. They rose ; but were soon defeated ; massacre followed ; the whole districts were nearly depopulated, and quite ready for new settlers, who were soon to give as much trouble as the old. This occurred under the reign of a Queen whose religion was that for which we would now shed our blood. It was after my grandfather's death that my father, who in-

herited lands in another district, and was known as O'Connor of Fitzclare, and sometimes, by the people, as Fitzclare of the Seven Castles, involved himself with the rulers of our land by wedding the O'More's daughter at the moment when her father stood at bay against his enemies. Until then he had given no ground of offence. From that time he became more or less suspected, and his actions have ever since been more or less observed.

“I may have spoken hardly of your country, Sir Guy ; but methinks the wrongs now practised against us will hand down to ages and ages to come the same sentiment of rankling animosity. At the same time, think me not so crack-brained as to believe mine to be still that island of saints of which our bards and romancers tell. No ! those saints might blush—if saints do blush—for the deeds that are done by their degenerate children. Even the spy and informer are to be found among our own people ; and the base crew that sweeps over from England, to seek their fortunes on the ruin of ours, find these creatures but too useful instru-

ments in attaining their object. This evil is increased, if not caused, by the miserable feuds that have from time immemorial divided us against one another. The desire of vengeance lurks long and deeply in an Irish breast; the clan of one man, for an injury caused by another, may pursue a whole family with unremitting hate. That my father has some such secret foe, or that there is a traitor in his house, many occurrences that reached my ear, while I was retained in the English Pale, have led me to believe."

The wild energy with which the young man had formerly spoken had been exchanged for a gravity more pleasing to his companion, who had begun to fear that he had been condemned to share his prison with a most determined and open rebel. His last words, and the sadness of the tone that uttered them, recalled the recollection of some he had heard from his sister: and the thought rapidly awoke another. He had, until that moment, forgotten what he believed to have been a trick played upon him in his tower-chamber during his abode—for

he had ceased to consider it imprisonment—in the island fort. Could that have been the design of a traitor who wanted to give information against Fitzclare? Unwilling to say to her betrothed that he had imputed the missive he had received to the little Isabel, he resolved on a future day to speak to him about it, and resumed the conversation by an inquiry concerning the further history of O'Connor.

“My father,” said Morven, “married, as think I told you, the daughter of O'More, the sister of the present chief of that clan.”

“The rebel against whom I led that hapless party,” D'Esterre interposed. “Little did I know that I should be thus conversing with his nephew in the Marshalsea.”

“The fortunes of war lead men to strange chances,” said Morven.

“War!” the other echoed in a tone of contempt, “call you that war? If it were, I should pray I might never see war again. But continue, I pray you, and let this pass.”

“My mother knew too well the troubles in which his union with her involved my father: he loved her to idolatry, and still almost wor-

ships her memory. Fear, anxiety, and grief, shortened her life. She died, and left him three children, two of whom, my sister and myself, were almost infants: my brother was about fourteen years of age. Her only bequest to him was these children; her last prayer was that for their sakes he would abstain rigidly from giving even the appearance of offence to the English Government. He promised; and so far as he could, he kept his promise; but my brother, as he grew towards manhood, showed another spirit. Had he lived to a ripe age, he would not have brooked what my father has. His impatient spirit caused an untimely death. While Fitzwilliam was the hateful Governor of Ireland, it was asserted that a vast quantity of treasure, taken from the lost vessels of the Spanish Armada, was secreted in some castles of the nobles on the western coast. One of these belonged to my father. In his absence a ruffianly host invaded our home: disappointed in their expected booty (for we had nothing but the broken rudder of a castaway ship), they attempted by every insult to provoke some act that would give a pretence

for the plunder they meditated. Unhappily, they succeeded too well, though to the cost of their leader. My young brother, in a burst of rage, seized a battle-axe, and laid him dead at his feet. His own blood was shed on the instant—the blood of an O'Connor for that of the low-born stranger !”

A smile, notwithstanding the gloomy character of the narrative he heard, played round the lip of D'Esterre at the closing words : he repressed it speedily.

“ And yourself and sister,” he asked, “ were you in that castle ?”

“ Yes, we were mere children ; my brother was not quite eighteen—the age my sister now is ; I was five years younger, and my sister is one year younger than I. When they had killed my gallant brother, they plundered the castle, and then fired it. This passed as an act of hasty vengeance for their leader's death.”

“ How, then, were you saved ?”

“ Singularly enough, Sir Guy—by a Puritan minister : one to whom we, good Catholics as we are, had given refuge. You know the axe or the halter of your Queen-Pope is as ready for one as the other. Well

—frown or smile as you please—let me tell you the rest. One of these poor heretics, in trying to save his conscience or his neck, was cast on our coast from a shipwrecked vessel. My father, who had not secreted the Spanish treasure, secreted the heretic. He was a good-minded man, though, of course, misled by Satan. He got to like us, became our tutor, taught us the English language, which we thus learned to speak, you see, as bravely as yourselves, and the French speech also.”

“I have heard Spanish spoken by your sister.”

“Oh! that of course: our connexions with Spain are close: it is our land of refuge.”

“Well! go on.”

“This poor minister discovered a former friend or relative among our invaders, whom he knew would not betray him, and by his means contrived to save us. Hidden in a cavern which communicated with the sea, we witnessed from its extremity the conflagration of our castle. Our father beheld the same; he was returning at night when the smoking and still blazing pile rose to his

view. At that moment he might have joined with his kinsman O'More in a vow of irreconcilable hatred and war against the English rule. But our heretic refugee came forth to meet him, carrying Hilda in his arms. The child had the mother's face, and her looks, her words, recalled the promise he had given to the dead. He then resolved to depart for Spain, and forsake the land which seemed given over to violence and wrong. It was necessary, however, to dispose of his lands in some way that would save him from ruin; and, while he was seeking to do this, another source of disturbance arose, and was the means of binding him to the land he would leave. A Spanish invasion was rumoured; in revenge for the loss of the Armada, it was said, a descent in favour of the rebels was projected by the Spaniards on the western coast. The chiefs were summoned to give hostages for their fidelity to Elizabeth of England. Resistance would have been vain, but my father, who is easily persuaded, and, like myself, prone to act on impulse, was led to believe that in his case an example of other more refractory nobles was the object in view. The hostages were

to be returned so soon as the threatened danger was over. I own to you, Sir Guy, that I would rather have drawn the sword with the Spaniards than have gone as a bondman to the English Pale. But what could be done? Hilda, poor girl, whose desire to leave her unhappy land was constantly increasing, joined with others in believing that a ready compliance with this mandate on our part would facilitate the measures our father contemplated, and that my detention would be very short. In fact, we had the promise of the Lord Deputy that I should be released almost immediately.

“Well! that Spanish invasion ended as others have done, but I have only been removed into safer durance, on the pretence that my father has taken part with O'More, attacked an English party, and wounded and imprisoned its officer,—the gallant knight, Sir Guy D'Esterre.”

Morven O'Connor rose up as he said the last word, and, walking away, flung himself on his rough couch, and appeared to fall fast asleep, leaving his companion to meditate as he pleased upon what he had heard.

CHAPTER XII.

TIME, at the best, passes but wearily in a prison ; on D'Esterre's hands it hung heavily. The silence of his friends distressed, and the aspect of his circumstances perplexed him.

“Surely, even had not Essex's ‘sickness’ left him, he should have sent or written to me,” he hourly thought. “I would write to Norris, were not that the sure way to anger Essex. He must be out of favour with the old lady—I must e'en wait till the sun shines on him again : when a man has to pretend his heart to be in the keeping of her who also makes him feel she has the care of his head, his friends need not marvel at some seeming forgetfulness.”

Thus, affecting to be patient under an

apparent neglect, which was daily becoming more irritating, Sir Guy was meditating the propriety of a letter to the now neglected wife of Essex, the widow of his first and honoured commander, Sir Philip Sidney—in which he would request tidings of her lord, and inform her of the mischance that had befallen himself.

The young Irishman, whose petulance at one time, and reckless disloyalty or random gaiety at another, often annoyed him, had been poring over a packet, the contents of which appeared difficult to decipher.

“Know you, Sir Guy,” he now asked, “one of the name of Symonds at the English camp?”

“I know that one of the name is said to have now the ear of the Lord Marshal,” was the answer; “but he is not one of my associates: he is one, methinks, of those who have yet their fortune to find, yet care not to carve their way to it with the sword. They say he serves the Government, nevertheless.”

“That is easy of belief. Beware, however,

sir knight, that you hint not ought to the discredit of that fair countryman of yours, since I must, in that case, avenge the honour of a man who, belike, ere this may be my plighted brother-in-law."

"What mean you?" cried D'Esterre, with a look and tone that made the careless speaker start.

"Nay," he said, smiling in scorn, "I am not thinking of measuring swords with you on his account—but Hilda—poor girl!—can they persuade her to such weakness?"

"May I ask," said Sir Guy, more calmly, "of what fresh matter you speak?"

"Why, that this Symonds, an old suitor for my sister's hand, has come forward again, offering my release in exchange for it." The speaker laughed aloud, as if in mockery of the proposal.

"You would not accept such terms?" said D'Esterre, and looked gravely and fixedly at him.

"Oh!" cried the other, "let me alone for that? When they come and say to me, Morven O'Connor of Fitzclare, your brother-

in-law keeps his word, and your prison-door is open,—see if I do not walk out of it ?”

Contempt and indignation were too legible on his companion's face not to be perceived by him. He burst into an almost frantic laugh.

“You see such is my baseness, Sir Guy,—you see what poor stuff the mere Irish are made of. Oh ! give me but the chance, and if my sword could not draw the black drop from that villain's heart, I should be content if his laid bare my own.”

“Calm yourself, Morven !” said D'Esterre, approaching the almost frenzied youth with altered sentiments ; “calm yourself, for your sister's sake, for if such treason threaten her, you must take measures to stop it.”

“What measures?”

“Write and warn her ; tell her this fellow cannot be trusted.”

“And how send the letter ? Think you any letters from my hand do not pass through other hands before they reach my father, or my father's house ?”

“Would to Heaven that I were free !”

cried D'Esterre ; "but can it be that your sister will listen to this vile man? How has she known him?"

"She does not know him. To me he became known while I was detained at the Pale. But no private communication with my family was allowed; at least, I knew that it could not be maintained. He therefore appears to her much as he did when he saved both our lives as children."

"How?"

"Symonds was the Saxon who, as I told you, our Puritan guest engaged on our behalf."

"What strange links in this chain of circumstances!" was D'Esterre's reflection. It passed unnoticed by the other, who added—

"Symonds accompanied that searching party to our castle, and while our old friend was the means of saving myself, he bore my sister to the cavern, and thus won a claim to our gratitude. At the time the castle was fired, almost all the retainers were absent save Hilda's nurse, who escaped with us; and a man named Lawrence also escaped then, who had not long joined us, and of whose previous

course or family we knew nothing : he came as a stranger, and, after the fashion of our country, he remained at his pleasure. I have since often wondered how this man contrived to save himself, for our nurse affirmed that he stood beside Roderick at the moment he struck that fatal blow, and had whispered some intelligence that enraged him, precisely as the leader of the band approached. It was not until my father had resettled at another dwelling-place that Lawrence was seen among us again. We were too young to suspect : our father too incautious, or too much engrossed by care : it is only since I have been a prisoner that I have begun to perceive signs of secret connexion between Symonds and this Lawrence."

"But how—I understand not"—cried D'Esterre, "how this Symonds can have dared—said you not that he had formerly been your sister's suitor?"

"Yes : he had at various times visited us, and received the hospitality given to all ; he had, however, attached himself to the fortunes of Sir John Perrot ; and when that unhappy Deputy was sent by his royal

half-sister to languish out his life in the Tower, Symonds, not liking such fortunes any longer, came to us, and, while Hilda was yet almost a child, demanded her in marriage. She was then of livelier mood than she is now ; and while the blood of the O'Connors boiled in the veins of my father and myself at the offered disgrace, she only made merry at the expense of her lover, whose age more than doubled her own, and who was not in other respects likely to take the fancy of a young maiden of good parts and so fair a countenance. Master Symonds was dismissed with but sorry success in his wooing. Soon afterwards I was claimed as the hostage of my house ; and now it seems that this base minion proposes my release as my fair sister's bridal gift ; and in case she refuses—”

The young man stopped, and, clasping his neck with both hands, added :—

“ Well ! your Queen, Sir Guy, learned an early lesson in the art of chopping off heads ; and, as her own fair mother said, I, too, can say, ‘ I have not a very large neck.’ Large or small, however, if I had as many as she has fingers, I would let her strike at them all be-

fore the blood of the O'Connor should mix with that of a low-born, villanous Saxon."

"To sacrifice her so were a deadly sin," said D'Esterre; "we must take measures, good Morven, to stop such villany. I will write to the Earl of Essex again, on the instant; it may, perchance, be that he has not had my letter."

The thought of his ring, so idly lost, returned, and in the narrative he had just heard, he found a corroboration of the opinion he had already begun to form: namely, that he had been decoyed into betraying his position to some secret spy or household traitor, who had made unfair use of his incautious act.

He now briefly related the occurrence to his companion; but felt a little discomposed when the young man inquired how, without desiring by that means to send intelligence of his state to the English camp, he had come to comply with a request for which he could not account.

His silence was an awkward one, for Morven's eyes, fixed on his countenance, expressed some doubtfulness as well as impatience for the answer.

"I like not mystery," said he at length, "where plain speaking can be used, and we have confusion enough around us already. This then was the case. There was in that place a merry sprite, whose mocking laughter had before then angered me ; I deemed her but a child, and thought the missive I received was but the prank of this wild child. Sooth to say, I wondered to learn, from some words I afterwards overheard, that she was already the betrothed of the absent heir of the house."

"Poor little Isabel ! dear girl, she holds to that betrothal still !" sighed Morven, whose easily diverted thoughts rested on the recollection recalled by the last words he had heard. "We were betrothed when her father, at her mother's death, first brought her to us from Spain, where she was born. She was then about as high as my knee, and I was twelve years old."

"You speak of her less warmly than she seems to feel for you," said Guy, smiling.

"Does she still feel warmly towards me ?" the other, with a kindling cheek, inquired. "But it were better she did not. If I ever am

free, my country must be my first bride : to its cause shall I devote myself. The fate of my poor mother shall not be that of my wife. And if I am not to be free, why should sorrow blight that gay young heart ?—better, a thousand times, in either case to be forgotten.”

“If his love were as deep or warm as hers,” thought D’Esterre, “he would not speak thus.”

“But Isabel, Sir Guy,” the other added, “had no part in the artifice of which you speak,—if, indeed, it were an artifice. It seems to me, rather, that some one having overheard your speech, believed you would willingly be released, and, wishing no good to our house, was desirous to be your messenger to the English camp.”

Guy coloured as the reflection these words excited passed through his thoughts. He recollected the noise on the rocks ; the terror of Hilda ; how she clung to him, and how his arm encircled her.

“Truly,” thought he to himself, “if a spy were there observing us, he might well have believed a token was necessary to witness against me, for, save by a foul cheatery, he

could not gain me to his ends. Fool that I was, to give way only to the lighter thoughts that airy little damsel put in my head !”

“And now, if that villanous Symonds triumphs !”—Springing to his feet with a noise that aroused his prison comrade from a deep reverie, he said aloud—“Time must not be lost ! Morven, I must write to Essex, to Norris, to Elizabeth herself,—to have a stop put to this iniquity.”

“Do so, good knight,” said the youth, with a gloomy smile, supposing he alluded to the general evil of the corruption that overspread his land. “Do so; and methinks the noble knights of old who took the holy cross as thou dost the pen, to war against the deadly dragon, never set before their valour a harder and a worthier task.”

D'Esterre set himself to the task, notwithstanding this scepticism as to its success. He wrote to Essex; and, while wearily, impatiently, and tediously awaiting an answer, he was at times amused, at others indignant, at the versatility of mind which caused his prison chamber to alternate with gloom and gaiety, as young Morven passed from de-

spondency to mirth, from pensiveness to light-hearted merriment, from almost frantic excitement respecting his sister's fate to an apparent oblivion of the circumstances which D'Esterre found to be almost engrossing himself.

Anxiety, grief, and distress, had the strange effect of rendering the young Irishman a more pleasant comrade : whether it was from that self-forgetting disposition which is one of the most pleasing, though to themselves unbeneficial parts of the national character, or from a sensitiveness of feeling that often leads its possessor to distract the pain it causes by apparently thoughtless merriment; certain it is that the wild legends, romantic tales, and bardic songs, with which Morven indulged his changeful humours, tended to beguile many an hour, which the more equable temperament of Guy D'Esterre would have rendered one of dreary monotony.

CHAPTER XIII.

WE left Hilda Fitzclare returning to the isolated and barren rock on which she dwelt, and seeing the airy figure of the young betrothed dancing to its own shadow. Isabel, light as a bird hopping from spray to spray, skipped down the intervening ledges of rock, and, with her last spring, alighted with extended arms clasping the graver lady's neck.

Hilda pressed her trembling lips silently on the young girl's forehead, then drawing her close to her side, and holding her there by an arm around her tiny and rounded waist, she ascended the rocks towards the keep of the fortress. There was something in her now flushed face and heaving bosom that gave even Isabel some perception of the

emotion that struggled in her heart. She walked beside her in silence. Some awe of her superior nature had always mingled with the child-like fondness she felt for one who had been for years as her elder sister. Isabel knew no one to love save Hilda and Morven, and she loved them with all the ardour of her nature.

They went on to the rocky platform beneath the tower ; and, entering one of its secret passages, proceeded to the chapel beneath the chamber that had been tenanted, so fatally to them, by the English knight. Still in silence Hilda approached towards the altar, and knelt, by the movement of her arm drawing the other also on her knees. Isabel joined in a prayer of which she knew not the purport. She knelt beside her as the innocent infant might do, looking in her countenance for direction or inspiration ; her soul all the time only praying that her sister's prayer might be granted. When Hilda bowed her sorrowful head, so did Isabel ; when Hilda rose up from prayer, Isabel, too, arose. But Isabel rose up as she had been when she knelt down. Hilda was not the

same. The flush on her cheeks was gone ; the heaving bosom was at rest ; the storm had been laid ; and the calm face was not only pale, but firm.

She drew the young girl's fair head on her breast, kissed the white temple, and said—

“ God will help us, mavourneen ; no harm shall come to you through me.”

“ Has that knight done you wrong, Hilda ?” she asked.

“ Us wrong ?” the other repeated, correcting the form of inquiry. “ You will hear all, dear, soon, that I have heard. There is, I fear me, but little truth on earth, and none in this wretched land : they who come to it lose what little they may have had.”

“ And Morven—O sister, tell me if that knight has betrayed the trust you persisted in reposing in him ?”

“ Such reproach, Isabel, must fall on me. To save Morven must, however, be our first thought. I tell you myself what you must otherwise hear, perhaps more rudely—Morven is going, perhaps gone, to London.”

A shriek from the poor child rang through the silent vault of the chapel.

“To that fierce woman who will fix his head over her gate! Oh! Hilda, Hilda, save him! It was your doing—oh! save him.”

Her cries, her tears, and sobs, rendered the few words useless that Hilda could force herself to utter; her own calmness might seem almost indifference to the frantically grieving child. She did all that such a state rendered available; she half led, half carried, the girl to her chamber; undressed and laid her on her couch, where, as her hysteric passion subsided, she finally sobbed herself to sleep.

Hilda opened a casement, and looked out at the serenely beaming moon,—the moon that always seems as much in contrast to the stirs and strife of this strange earth, as her own face had lately been to that of the wildly grieving Isabel.

“I have been deceived, betrayed,” she thought, “but truth will yet prevail. How these words haunt me ever! the last that our poor heretic *refugé* ever spoke—‘Truth,’ he said, with his dying lips, ‘will prevail.’ We see not great signs of that; yet, nevertheless, I will try its power. I will myself to the Lord Deputy: if he will not hear me, his

Queen will. Elizabeth of England, fierce as she is, they say understands justice, though her servants administer it not. Never shall I know rest nor ease till the truth be made known, and Morven saved, or the race of the O'Connors of Fitzclare be ended."

So did Hilda's thoughts syllable themselves to herself; but, almost unheard by her, there was another voice in her secret heart, ever and anon suggesting a doubt of the veracity of the tale she had been told. It was that strong perception which high and pure natures generally have of spirits akin to their own, which had led her originally to trust, and still forbade her entirely to believe evil of the English stranger. That one earnest gaze, in which each soul seemed to penetrate the other, was still unforgotten; and if a blush coloured her cheek as she thought of it, the thought was not altogether distressful. It was from that she drew an excuse to herself, though not to others, for the seemingly bold step she had taken.

"And can one with speech so noble, with looks so brave and undisguised, be thus cowardly and false?"

So she seemed to inquire of the cold, pure moon, as her large, deep eyes were raised to it as earnestly as if she expected an answer from it.

Thus was she still meditating when some days had passed away, and brought no change, neither reply to the question.—The childish complainings of little Isabel irritated, almost as much as they pained, her ; her endless questionings wearied her : and she sometimes listened in silence to inquiries that could not be answered. Her father maintained a moody reserve : he seemed to wait for a doom he could not avert. Isabel betook herself to the old nurse for companionship or sympathy ; and Hilda continued to haunt that rocky platform alone, its stillness broken only by the dash of the waves, the melancholy cry of the seagull, or the distant scream of the eagle.

The seat on the rock, where D'Esterre had once overheard her conversing with the young betrothed, was now usually occupied by her alone. One evening, as she sat there, the distant sound of Fedlim's harp—a sound but seldom heard there now,—gave her notice that strangers had arrived in the hall of the

fortress, for to receive or honour such the harp of the bard was always required. On such occasions, unless summoned, the female part of a household did not appear in the hall. Hilda, therefore, retained her seat, and continued her anxious meditations. She heard, after some time, an advancing step ; she expected a summons to the hall, and, reluctant to obey it, still sat quiet, hoping not to be seen by the messenger.

He had, however, seen her at once, but stood looking at her with a questioning, wondering expression. A man stood a little above her on the rock. Three years had passed since he had seen Hilda Fitzclare,—seen her as a beautiful high-spirited girl, just emerging from childhood, haughty and proud, yet wild and free. She had despised him—mocked and laughed at his suit. Now she rose and stood before him, collected, though surprised—her head slightly thrown back, her tall figure drawn up,—the face of the child toned to the thoughtful mind of the woman,—while, paler, but as beautiful as ever, it was turned to him with an air of stately inquiry as to the cause of the stran-

ger's presence. A stranger he was to Hilda at the moment; for if three years of age had changed and developed the person of the child, three years of dissipation, of dishonest toils, and anxious pursuit of unlawful gains, had still more changed, and planted far other and more evil signs of their progress in the person of the base adventurer. Symonds felt himself shrinking from her gaze; a western sun-ray, slanting obliquely on the rock fell on the golden bodkin in her black hair: it sparkled and glanced in the light; a sort of glory seemed to rest over her head, and to dazzle the bad man's vision.

Slowly her remembrance of her sometime suitor awoke.

"Master Symonds!" in a tone of surprise, were her only words.

He bowed, with an air so miserably awkward as at once engaged her to set him more at ease; and, stepping up from her lower position, she stood beside him, and inquired if he would repair to her father's hall.

"My business is with you, fair lady," said the quickly reassured man; "I have jour-

neyed here on purpose to confer with Lady Hilda."

"Great pains, I fear me, for scant reward," she answered, with a slight curl of the finely cut lip.

There is a curious trick of the eyes that some people are subject to, which makes them turn inward when any matter of cogitation or perplexity of mind abruptly comes across them. Only a small portion of the whites of Symonds' became visible under the half-closed lids. His mouth was affected by a contrary motion, for the lips partly opened with a hasty spasmodic gasp that brought his teeth together with an almost audible sound. Another instant, and the face was smooth; a look of gentleness, almost of pity, was cast upon the haughty speaker.

"It may be vain for me to commend my motives to the Lady Hilda Fitzclare," he said, "but the past cannot be lightly forgotten; nor am I one prone to forget.—Taunt me not, therefore, lady, if I repeat my words, that for you, and on your account alone, I have revisited your house; and, in

pledge of my truthfulness, I produce a token that may be known to you."

He drew out and held towards her the ring of which mention has been already made.

A deep burning glow overspread the lately pale face. She had first noticed that signet when it rested in the apparently lifeless hand of the wounded knight. With its present appearance she beheld the restoration of her former trustfulness in his honour and truth. Symonds had, she concluded, come from him with this ring as the then common form of certificate, or credentials, of a messenger. One single glance of the mind, quick as the passage of light itself, had taken in this, and more than this, in connexion with the sight of the token held before her; and the eyes, lately so cold and proud, drooped under the long lashes as she murmured the words—

"Sir Guy D'Esterre's!"

With the ring held towards her, his keen, uneasy eyes riveted on the blushing face and suddenly altered mien, Symonds stood silent, endeavouring to collect from these appearances some clue to the nature of the

expectation which he saw its sight had excited. His associate, Lawrence, he had not seen since Hilda had heard from that man the tale he had himself chiefly invented on the impulse, or necessity, of the moment. Her present emotion he attributed wholly to an affection for Sir Guy. A spasm of anger worked for a moment over his features; but her few words brought to the mouth which was the most expressively bad among them, a smile or grin of triumph.

"This ring is Sir Guy D'Esterre's, lady?" he repeated, as a question.

"Yes; what says he?" she replied, without lifting the eyes, of whose power of mirroring every thought she was, perhaps, herself aware.

"Ho!" thought Symonds, "the ground is yet open, I must plant the seed most likely to suit myself. She knows not yet of what has passed."

That Lawrence had already conveyed to her so much information bordering on the truth, he was far from suspecting. To gain both time to arrange his plan, so as to fashion it to the changed character he found

he had now to deal with, and to acquire further information on circumstances as yet only partially known to him, and to avoid compromising himself by words he might again desire to retract—were now this man's objects. She had already committed herself by an incautious recognition of the ring, and of the name of its owner. An evasive answer to her inquiry as to the tidings sent with it, his subtle wit now perceived to be the safest.

"Weighty affairs," he said, "now engage that knight, to the prevention of all other cares. By to-morrow eve I shall have further tidings for the Lady Hilda's ear.—Had she not deemed my visit here uncalled-for, I had not produced the token of Sir Guy until these tidings were presented with it."

Hilda bowed her head, and, only saying—

"I bid you to the hall, Master Symonds; the supper, methinks, must wait, for the sun is down,"—passed on with a stately step, already half repentant of the consciousness she had betrayed.

Symonds dared not join, and would not

follow her : he stood looking over the sea until she had gone some little distance, then took his own way to the chieftain's hall, not more eager for his supper than he was to meet the dark-faced Lawrence.

The hall of O'Connor was then unusually filled : his affairs were becoming known, and many resorted to it as to the cave of Adullam in the times of David of Israel, and from much the same causes. It was supposed impossible for that chief to avoid a rising, and his union with O'Neil and the young Tirconnel was freely spoken of. Fitzclare took no step, and said no word to strengthen or contradict such a belief. If his son's life were taken, he had vowed in his heart to avenge him in whatever way he could : beyond that vow he did not go, but awaited in gloom rather than anxiety the fatal tidings he was convinced he should receive.

On the present occasion, however, the feast was spread in his rude vaulted hall, and Fitzclare feasted, or appeared to feast, with his clan ; for the guest whom he received, with the accustomed rites of hos-

pitality, had come as the envoy of the Lord Marshal, and pride still more than policy dictated the courteous reception he had met, and the profuse liberality with which he was entertained.

The table, served with dishes most relished by the Irish people, of which pork was then, as it may still be, a favourite one, was surrounded by the followers of the chief, whose wild voices acquired additional elevation from the strong fermented liquors which the attendants presented in cups of brass, while the old bard, seated in the place of honour, raised the exhilaration still higher by singing the praises of their heroes of old, and the glories of other days.

It was night, and the rough floor of that hall was well-nigh covered with the bodies of the late revellers, who lay stretched upon their usual bed, sleeping as if to wake no more. Fitzclare had long withdrawn, and, if he slept, two only of the men who had joined, or seemed to join, that "wassail roar" were now awake. The bard had guided the guest to his room, and, according to the established rule, chanted a tale to lull him to

sleep. Symonds was apparently plunged into profound slumber immediately, and the old man, satisfying himself that his task was done, retired to indulge in the same. Then the guest rose up, hastily re-attired himself, and descended to the hall he had left. Disturbing with a foot one of the sleeping bodies, he made a signal for silence, and beckoned the man to rise. A few minutes afterwards he and Lawrence stood together on the steps at the base of the rocks.

"Wherefore not arrange an easier meeting?" said Symonds, angrily; "if I had not feigned sleep the old wizard would have sat droning beside me all night."

"Wherefore seek a meeting at all?" returned Lawrence; "I wanted none."

"Fool! at the moment our projects are ripening"—

"Yours, mayhap: you may deem so."

"And why not thine? Are they not one?"

"No; you seek the misery of the daughter by making her your wife, that her dower may be yours also. I was bound by a vow pledged to the dying, and repeated over the dead, to pursue O'Connor and his sons until

my mother's oath of vengeance against his father's house were accomplished. For this she trained me, and to this with her dying breath she bound me. You work for the base love of gold ; I, for vengeance."

"It is false! I love the maiden," cried Symonds.

"Love!" echoed Lawrence, with a hoarse and provoking laugh, or a sound rather that imitated laughter. "Your wooing, I trow, will be made at the sword's point, and your love-speeches uttered in the presence of the Lord Marshal's soldiery!"

"When that is so, look to thyself, Master Lawrence, lest his soldiers mistake thee for an honest man, and put thee out of their way for lack of better use for their weapons."

"I will say I am your friend, and no one will suspect me of honesty."

Flushed with strong drink, angry at an impertinence which, however accustomed he was to the morose and taunting manner of his associate, was galling to his craven nature, Symonds struck him sharply with his undrawn sword, which for precaution he car-

ried in his hand. The next instant he repented of an act which would make an enemy of an ally. Before the other could bring speech from the lips which were pale with deadly passion, he said—

“Be not wroth, good friend, I do but jest; as our gracious Queen did but lately when she boxed the ears of the great Earl of Essex. Let us be friends, Lawrence, for we cannot do apart!”

The moonlight scantily allowed a glimpse of the man's countenance to whom he spoke: had it been fully revealed, Symonds' coward heart would have quailed at its expression. Though, by a freak of nature which rendered him disproportioned, Lawrence was almost a diminutive man, he possessed considerable strength. Standing on a slight elevation above Symonds, he had another advantage; his face—

“Pale as marble o'er the tomb,
Whose pallid whiteness aids its gloom”—

was composed to rigidity, as, suddenly leaning forward, he seized Symonds by the back of the neck, and, with an unexpected jerk,

plunged him downward into the sea that laved the base of the rock.

A miserable cry broke the stillness of the hour. It soon ceased; and Lawrence, listening till the stillness returned, then rapidly moved away, and ascended the pile of rock. Before he reached the summit, he stopped, turned, gazed over the tranquil sea, and finally sat down, looking on it as wave after wave swept on, to return to the deep they left.

“So,” he said, “that hated yoke is burst, and by his own hand; blow has been given for blow—the life of a base Saxon for a blow given to a Mac Mahon. Now Hilda is free! Weakness, miserable weakness, though it is to feel thus for one of O’Connor’s blood, I would rather see her father, her gay, silly, taunting young brother, free and happy, than see her the bride of that base hireling! Was it not I who made him save her at the very moment when I had instigated her proud brother to the act that cost him his life: had Morven perished then, when his elder brother fell, my task had now been well nigh done. Detested Saxons! Think ye I care for your

gold? Would that your whole herd lay where yon miscreant lies!"

Amid the dark and, unconsciously to himself, repentant thoughts that swept gloomily over the mind of this man, not one touch of remorse for his recent act assailed his breast. He thought no more of having drowned the English adventurer than he would have done for the death of a reptile his foot shoved out of his path.

Other painful thoughts weighed heavily on a heart in which vengeance had worked with all the worst effects of an intense and devouring bigotry.

To revenge he had been dedicated in boyhood—a vengeance that had already descended to a second generation, and was yet unaccomplished. A long-established feud between the O'Connors and Mac Mahons might have seemed to be extinct, when, in a bloody fray, the whole family of the latter, with the exception of the mother and her youngest son, who was then a child, were killed, O'Connor, and his younger and more fiery-tempered brother, being engaged in it. That brother had soon after fallen a victim, no one

knew how, to the spirit of revenge. A more lingering destiny was reserved for O'Connor. The widowed mother reserved for her only surviving child this so-esteemed sacred duty. To it she vowed him at the cursing-stone.* Now came before him, passing like the shadowing of a great cloud between him and the pale, holy moonlight, the memory of that hour which had stopped for ever the spring of youth, hope, almost of life, in the heart that henceforth was devoted to gloom. The wild scene, the fearful stone, the weird aspect of his mother, wasted by sorrow, and looking taller in the gray twilight, as she stood in her uncouth garb,—her long, thin

* The superstition connected with this stone is, or, even at the earlier part of this century, was, among the the few of a fearful character remaining in Ireland. The author is unacquainted with the changes which late years may have wrought in that country. Formerly, that stone was one of those Druidic remains so common and so curious there. People sometimes resorted to it from great distances for the purpose of cursing their enemies, who were then believed to be given over to the power of demons. Vows of enmity or vengeance were made, and held sacredly binding. It is a curious instance of the descent of a heathen tradition.

arm upraised from the large rough mantle : the ceremonies of that dark superstition ; the dread that seized the mind of one who was then only on the verge of youth, and who felt far more fear of the supernatural terrors of that place than he did at the prospect of a life devoted to hatred and revenge,—yet knew a change passed over him as he breathed that vow which, in one minute's space, separated the past from the future of his existence.

For one year after that time his mother had lingered : her voice would often startle him in the stillness of night, uttering fierce ravings against the O'Connors. She died, causing him to promise instantly to set about the execution of his vow. When she was dead, Lawrence looked on the corpse of a mother who had loved him with all the fierce strength of an almost savage nature. Neither relative, friend, nor acquaintance, had he then left, for she had retired into an utter seclusion, where she had nursed him up to revenge her husband and sons, as a pious parent might train her child for a holy work.

He buried his mother, and went out on the world alone and unknown: the name of Mac Mahon he dropped, and called himself Lawrence. Accident brought him into connexion with Symonds, to whom, with national incaution, he was beguiled to reveal his history, and the vow of vengeance he had taken. That man at once perceived the use he could turn this to, and enrich himself, while Lawrence gratified his passion by the ruin of the chief.

It was by his device that the latter entered the service of O'Connor, or rather, that he repaired to his castle, where free and open quarters were easily to be had, without a question being asked. There, hereditary hatred became personal, at least, in regard to the young heir of the house, the proud and rash Roderick, whose witty and gay humour was too often indulged at the expense of the short legs and large body of the newcomer. Susceptible, silent, morose, Lawrence drew from these taunts that fuel which a passion that might otherwise have slackened so much needed. The natural kindness of the father, the careless merri-

ment of the younger boy, but, above all, the tenderness of the little Hilda, to whom any oppression or suffering was a plea for attachment or support, might have weaned him from a purpose less steadfastly and superstitiously embraced. But the reckless temper of the elder son counterbalanced the softening tendency of that of the others. *

The search for Spanish treasure, said to be taken from the lost vessels of the Armada, first brought Symonds, then a creature of the Lord Deputy, to O'Connor's castle. The same event gave Lawrence his first act of vengeance. He roused the fiery temper of the young Roderick against the leader of the searching party, until he provoked the fatal blow that was instantly avenged by his followers in the manner Morven already related.

That one deed of blood cooled for the time the fever that devoured the wretched votary of revenge. Symonds, to his astonishment, had found his good Puritan and proscribed uncle concealed and protected by the proscribed Papist. If not instigated by Lawrence to save Hilda, he was,

at least, permitted by him to do so,—the English tutor having, without their help, and, perhaps, against their wish, already saved her brother.

Immersed in other engagements, or absorbed in other schemes, Symonds had been unable to devote his time to projects against O'Connor, and had kept Lawrence for nearly three years as a sort of dependent spy, averring that the quietness of the chief gave as yet no pretence for proceeding against him in the manner they had projected. At the end of that time his own prospects changed, and, leaving Perrot, his fallen master, to languish out his life in the Tower of London, he repaired to the inland castle, to which O'Connor had retired on the destruction of the stronger one on the sea coast. There he found one obstruction in his path was removed; the old Puritan was dead, and buried by the pertinacious Irish; and another scheme, perhaps latent there from the moment he had carried the child from the fire into the cavern, arose in his ever-scheming mind. Hilda was in her sixteenth year—a lovely, proud, and saucy girl. The

notion of a compromise by taking the daughter of Fitzclare to wife, with the half of her father's wealth, instead of goading him to conduct that would obtain the alienation of it all, with the loss of life or liberty to himself and his son, now became his plan. This was made known to, or discovered by, Lawrence, who then saw himself to have been merely the instrument by which the Saxon adventurer would work his own objects.

Detestation of his associate soon acquired strength, and he made a determination to reverse the case, and use Symonds from that time as a means to attain his own single end. That Hilda of Fitzclare would refuse him with scorn he was well assured; that she never should be betrayed, or forced into a marriage with him, he also resolved. Disappointed in his wooing, and irritated by the scornful mockery of the haughty child, Symonds left the O'Connors, and soon after contrived to accomplish the only act which Lawrence felt to be a step, on his part, towards the fulfilment of his vow. Morven O'Connor was taken to the

English Pale, as hostage for his father. That he would never be delivered back he was assured. By nature Lawrence was unformed for the terrible task laid upon him : he would even rather save than crush an insect, unless it were one that stung or angered him : he felt a degree of horror at the idea of shedding by murder the blood of the O'Connors ; neither would he, by compassing merely their death, fulfil the oath his vengeful mother had laid upon him. To leave his only son, the hero of his name, to waste out life in a prison, was just in unison with his still undecided nature : to goad on the father to an act of hostility to the Government was now all he wished to do.

But even in this removal of Morven O'Connor, Lawrence saw something more on the part of Symonds than a simple act of spite at his successful suit. He did not believe that man's hopes to be extinguished ; and he knew how important it was to these that the spirited young heir should be taken out of the way ; and how much more desirable Symonds would deem the match with the sister,

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if he had ceased to live. Thus, hating his associate, and wishing to cross his schemes, Lawrence was angry at the success of his own purpose when it tended to advance that of the Saxon.

The incident that occurred with respect to the English officer, was the only one that gave him a chance of acting for himself, without the co-operation, and consequently, he supposed, without any advantage to that adventurer. For that reason he had watched, and listened, and observed all that passed during his illness and detention in the keep, and having so easily succeeded in obtaining from him the token of identity, he had set off to the English camp, to give information—not being aware that Symonds was there at the time, and would step in, like the fox in the fable, to apportion the amount of benefit to each that might accrue from such a piece of intelligence. But his interview with Hilda, notwithstanding the false tale he had improvised for her ear, to allay her suspicions, had caused him to feel towards her as he had never done for one of the human race. The emotion

he then felt was a strange one for a heart like his : if it could have continued that heart might have been renewed—made as when it first was formed by God. Remorse, pity, respect, tenderness,—yes, even love,—combined to form that strange and brief emotion in a heart that had been warped from good, or kept in ignorance of all good, Brief as that reviving was, it gave that wretched heart a rest such as the spirit in suffering might know who was for one instant allowed to enjoy the repose of those in peace.—Merely to feel good is itself a bliss.

To such a nature the very success of his plighted enmity to the O'Connors was sure to deaden the zeal that guided it into action. Already a degree of reluctance to effect the full accomplishment of his vow was at intervals known to himself; but the knowledge only exasperated and stimulated him to fitful efforts, or to malignant tempers, such as had been so beautifully met by poor Hilda when he tried to gall her by the forged account of Sir Guy D'Esterre's dishonourable conduct.

CHAPTER XIV.

LAWRENCE had left his place on the rocks, to resume that he had vacated on the summons of Symonds, on the rush-strewn floor of O'Connor's hall. There he lay; the thought that he had taken the life of a human being not in the least tormenting him; or, at least, exciting very different sensations from what he would have experienced on shedding the blood of an O'Connor—of one of his own country's chiefs. A base-born Saxon, and a hireling who worked for gold and not for vengeance, was no more in his estimation than any other animal; he was, moreover, a Protestant, and Lawrence had not, therefore, the sin to answer for, of putting a man to death without benefit of clergy. Hilda was saved, and he himself was free from an association he loathed.

So the man thought, as he lay down in his lair ; but, all the time, the other, whom he supposed to be somewhere beyond the limits of this earth, was disrobing himself, not of this mortal coil, but of sundry earthly garments which were saturated with seawater ; having quietly re-entered the chamber he had left. In fact Lawrence had forgotten the practice lately adopted of mooring a boat close to the spot from which Symonds fell. His cry had ceased, not when choked by the water, but when the wave drove him against the boat, which his hand quickly grasped. A coward in his heart, and fearing another attack from his late confederate, he remained in the boat until he thought Lawrence had retired to the hall, and then, cautiously creeping along the side of the rocks, he, too, remounted to the lodging he had so unprofitably left.

There was matter enough to keep him waking, but the effects of a cold bath after a long ride produced a degree of exhaustion that forced him into sleep which lasted until far in the day. On waking, he started up in a paroxysm of dread. If Lawrence had

the start of him in accusation to O'Connor, he was lost: his only plan now was to betray Lawrence, and gain the merit of discovering and revealing to his lord the fact that he had a traitor in his house.

Very wily persons are often exceeding blunderers; it never occurred to him that if Lawrence believed he had caused his death, he would let the matter rest, and be the last to mention his name, or to seem desirous to blacken his character.

Such, indeed, was the case, for that person, wishing to be out of the way when, perhaps, the Saxon's body might be found, had managed to be sent, on a message of some importance to O'Connor, to a place from whence he could not return for a few days. Ignorant of this, and ignorant also that the chief had likewise left the fort at day-dawn, Symonds, fevered with impatience and anxiety, fearing to meet Lawrence in the hall, yet dreading that he had already revealed enough of his villany to O'Connor to render his stay there impossible, even if the respect paid to the laws of hospitality rendered it safe, continued for hours to prowl around the quarter wherein he was lodged,

hoping to intercept some one who spoke enough of English to give him the intelligence which he had art enough to draw even from a reluctant speaker.

No one, however, came that way : no trace of womankind was visible : during the now frequent absences of the chief, the ladies and their attendants always retired to the detached keep, which, only communicating with the abode of the retainers by means of a drawbridge, afforded them a perfectly secluded dwelling-place. In equal ignorance of this practice as he was of other domestic circumstances, Symonds harassed himself by a thousand conjectures ; and attributed to design, on the part of O'Connor and his daughter, the total abandonment to which he was left.

Hilda, on the contrary, had, as her custom was, risen with the sun, and still struggled with the intense desire which, in spite of her efforts against it, only increased, to hear from him the tidings which he had given her to understand he bore from Sir Guy D'Esterre. The night before she had left him with the proud resolve, expressed even

in her manner, to seek no further tidings from him, nor intercourse with him ; and now, believing him either to be in the hall, or to have already quitted the fort, she concluded that he had conceived this apparent and haughty indifference a sufficient warrant for a departure without further communication.

The day had advanced, and hunger began to increase the discomforts of the perplexed Symonds, when he perceived the old nurse advancing towards him. This woman, although indignant at his presumption, and somewhat suspicious of his sincerity, had never forgotten that to him she owed the life of her foster-child. Her knowledge of English was sufficient for his purpose ; but the designing, as well as the wicked, are often in fear where no fear is ; and so his fears as to what she might already know created a long delay before he had artfully extracted from her a piece of intelligence she would have given as promptly as simply had she been directly questioned,—namely, that Lawrence and the chief had both gone out with the morning's dawn ; and that she had heard nothing whatever of himself, but sup-

posed, as her young mistress did, that he, too, had departed.

Lawrence had gone away, but O'Connor also had done so. "No doubt," thought his coward heart, "on some purpose against me." But no! that was absurd: he was amenable to no laws, save those fierce ones by which an Irish chief might find himself justified in avenging violated honour and honesty. His next thought and wiser reflection was that Lawrence believed him to have been drowned—a truth that never previously occurred to him; for, on finding the boat moored so close to the spot where he fell, he supposed that the other, knowing it to be there, had seen him almost immediately grasp its side, and that the cessation of the cry he uttered had given him intelligence of his safety. He did not until now ascribe to that man a determined intention to drown him; but rather attributed his immersion to an act of hasty resentment. The absence of Lawrence without having, so far as he could learn, even named him, although his usual office was to wait on strangers with the morning cup, gave another colouring to

his opinion ; and Symonds saw the necessity of at once saving and avenging himself by a double denunciation of his late confederate, as a traitor to his lord, and an assassin by design of himself.

Prepared with this tale, he sent by Canna a message to her mistress, demanding, rather than in his customary manner craving, an interview with her, as her father's substitute, on a matter of moment to her house. Had it been merely to announce his tidings from D'Esterre, Hilda would have hesitated, might have contended against her own anxiety to receive them. As it was, duty required an acquiescence, and she received the man she could not help despising, much as a queen might receive an ambassador from a wily and untrustful power, to whom a sense of her own weakness compelled her to grant an audience.

Symonds did not now shrink abashed from her eyes as he often had done : these truth-demanding eyes were looking into his, and he met their clear, deep gaze, fortified by two cogent reasons : first, his case, if he could not do so, were helpless ; secondly, he

had a little truth on his side, and very easily believed he had a great deal.

With a straightforwardness quite unusual to his manner, he briefly related the event of the preceding night.

The lady listened to him with a surprise she sought not to conceal, as he accounted for his late appearance by relating the attempt made upon his life on the preceding night by one of her father's retainers.

Before the short narrative was ended, that expression of surprise changed to one of ineffable disgust.

"And is it thus that a second time the honour of O'Connor is to be impugned?" she said; "were not the base version already given of one Saxon life endangered by him, enough to accomplish the end designed, without another being added to it?"

It was seldom that Symonds ever felt what it was to be falsely accused: it was a sort of pleasure to him to hear Hilda attribute to him an act of vileness of which he had not even entertained the thought.

His face expressed that pleasure, as, with the calmness which truth only can really give, he answered—

“Your suspicion, lady, is too natural to excite anger in one who is its object. Beset, as you are, or as your father is, by spies and traitors, it may be safer to mistrust all than to trust to any. Nevertheless, what I have said is true, and, if you desire it, not even to O'Connor shall the deed be made known.”

“I desire no secrets,” said Hilda, coldly ; “and were such a deed attempted, it ought to be speedily punished. Say, then, if you know it, the name of the man you accuse.”

“One who goes by the name of Lawrence.”

“Lawrence !” she cried, with a start, recollecting the intimacy that had subsisted between the two, and her own recent doubt of that man’s fidelity. “Lawrence !” she repeated, in a low, musing tone, and the even painfully rushing blood that crimsoned the slender throat, and ascended to the fair temples, might show to one of finer

perceptions than the man before her, the rapid association of thought which connected his information with the latent hope of her heart.

Lawrence was false !—and, as a sequence, Sir Guy D'Esterre was true. Such were the links so rapidly connected by the thoughts that, with an electric thrill, stirred the whole current of her blood with a flush of joy. That his tidings, so gravely imparted, gave his strange hearer more pleasure than pain, Hilda's face was too pure, her eyes too faithful, to prevent him from perceiving : but, still in ignorance of the narrative Lawrence had given her, he could not divine the cause of that emotion. Hope—a joy, the excess of which alarmed, almost ashamed, herself—rendered her so beautiful, that the cause of that accession of beauty was overlooked by the low-minded Symonds, who derived from it only a stimulus to the base efforts he was making to accomplish his purpose.

“She shall be mine !” was the vow he was mentally breathing, when Hilda, passing her hand, as if by an accidental movement, across her eyes, said slowly—

"Lawrence, then, is false ! and his treachery has had relation to—to—the Saxon—to him of whom you spake yester-even ?"

"It has."

"God be praised !" burst from his hearer's trembling lips, as he uttered the confirmatory words : two little words, so full of a significancy to her, which was not even imagined by him.

The astonishment depicted on the countenance of Symonds would have produced a change in her state of feeling had she beheld it ; but, conscious of her own emotion,—convicted, as it were, in the presence of the last person in the world she would have liked to witness it, she bowed her face, as she breathed the ascription of thanks, upon both her hands, pressing the points of the fingers on her suffusing eyes.

"Small cause for thankfulness, I trow, has the Lady Hilda for this," said he,—after a short observation,—“scarcely more than I myself have had :—unless it be that the designs of the traitors against one who would fain overthrow them, may be to her a ground for such satisfaction.”

His voice more than his words recalled her to self-collectedness. Not destitute of self-command, she could speedily recover from the agitation which the sensitiveness of a fine nature occasioned.

"I crave your pardon, Master Symonds," she said,—“in my satisfaction at finding that knight's honour was unimpaired, I forgot, for the moment, the danger you had run in our service.”

She spoke and looked so kindly—for happiness begets kindness—that he felt a step was made in his progress.

“Of what knight, I pray you, may you speak?” was his cautious, or, rather, artful inquiry.

“Of him whose messenger you announced yourself to be—of him whose signet you showed me,” she answered, meeting his gaze, as if she meant to say there could be no real doubt of her meaning.

“Pardon my doubtfulness—there is, methinks, reason for it. Lady Hilda refers to the signet she recognised as that of her Grace's servant, Sir Guy D'Esterre?”

Hilda bowed her head; a chill seemed already creeping to her heart.

“From whom,” she said, in a voice that was far from firmness, “Master Symonds expected to have further tidings to impart to-day?”

“Again I cry you pardon, lady ; here is some error. I came not here as the messenger of Sir Guy D'Esterre, and I bear his signet for a very different purpose from that which Lady Hilda may expect;—it is not as a token of honour, truthfulness, or love, to her, or her father's house, that I brought hither the ring ; neither were the tidings of such a nature which I expected this day to have to impart.”

Hilda had remained standing, because she intended this man's visit to be short, and would not ask him to be seated. Now, with a sudden trembling, she sat down to conceal what the paleness of her lately blushing face betrayed—the pang that seemed to stop the pulses of her heart.

“When men speak in mystery, the wit of woman must be quicker than mine that does not lead them to a rash conclusion,” she said.

Symonds, in an humble manner, made reply—

“Lady Hilda has twice this day misconstrued my conduct, and misunderstood my words,—imputing to me the designs which I came here bent on subverting, and understanding as a dark speech the truth I uttered. The day on which I was so blessed as to be able to save her life, the years that have since passed, have not been blotted from my memory; my mind is still the same, and whether I am trusted or scorned, my purpose shall not alter.”

She did not answer, and he continued—

“If it please you to recollect, you will, mayhap, see no mystery in my words or conduct. I presented that ring yester-even, because it was necessary that it should be recognised as one belonging to the English officer who had been concealed in this fort.”

“Concealed!” cried Hilda—but with an abashed countenance speedily drooped her head, as if in assent to the word.

“It was recognised by you, lady, as that of Sir Guy D'Esterre.”

Again a silence, but a sort of quiver that told of a mental rack.

“ You demanded further tidings, of which you concluded me to be the bearer. Before I could give you the information I had come to deliver, it was necessary to confront the traitor, whom I knew to be within your own walls. I could not answer directly to your question, but I did so truly. I told you Sir Guy had weighty matters to care for at the present moment, and added, that on the morrow I should be able to give you further tidings. It was not from Sir Guy D'Esterre, but from the man named Lawrence, I hoped to receive them. For that purpose I drew the traitor from your father's hall after the midnight hour had passed. We stood on the edge of the rock when I showed him this ring, and charged him with his villany. His answer was a blow that precipitated me into the sea, where, doubtless, he believes me now to lie ; and the evidence of his treachery, and of the honourable knight's fidelity to his allegiance to her Grace the Queen, to be buried with me !”

The sneering tone of the last words was an escape of the man's natural humour : he could not forbear the passing sting. But

anxiety, wonder, and almost horror, at what she heard rendered his hearer little sensible of this. She motioned Symonds to a seat, and requested a further account of the part Lawrence had acted.

"That man," he continued, "became known to me some time ago, in consequence of a design I happily was able to frustrate, against his lord. Possessing, as I do, the favour and confidence of the Lord Marshal, it was my good fortune on several occasions to be able to turn away the results that would have followed this fellow's plots against O'Connor."

"Wherefore not sooner reveal them?" asked Hilda, impatiently looking up.

"I had not your favour, lady, nor the friendship of O'Connor—perhaps not your confidence: it was better to labour to circumvent the evil that was on foot, than, by a disclosure that was uncredited, do myself an injury, and your house no good. It was but of late that I discovered this Lawrence to be vowed to a revengeful purpose, the object of which was the ruin of O'Connor and all his race."

Hilda sat as if transfixed, erect and rigid, gazing mutely on his face.

With what may be called an inward smile, since it was not suffered to disarrange the gravity of that face, he continued—

“His designs, so often subverted, have now been met with a deplorable success. The accident, or whatever else it may be termed, that led to the concealment of a wounded English officer in the fortress of his too often suspected chief, was discovered by this Lawrence. When Sir Guy became impatient of detention, he contrived in some manner to enter into conference with him ; the issue of which was, that the traitor was despatched to the British camp, bearing this signet as his credentials, to give information concerning his state, and demand assistance. A band of soldiers was already ordered to proceed against O'Connor, when Sir Guy, having effected his escape, returned to his quarters.”

“Effected his escape?” said Hilda, in a tone that startled Symonds with the intimation that he was getting out of his depth.

“Effected his escape, or obtained deli-

verance, it matters not which," he added, carelessly ; " for such words must sound but harsh to an ear so nice. Suffice it now to say, that, having learned the consequences of this double treachery, I besought the Lord Marshal, who owes me some return for my service, to stay the execution of the measures resolved upon, until I could myself inquire into the truth of the affair."

" And Morven,—my brother," gasped Hilda. " Is it, then, true of him also?"

" You have heard of him?"—was said in an inquiry, for Symonds had to feel his way.

" From Lawrence," she replied, with an effort pronouncing his name. " I was told by him what you have now told me, with some additions, it is true, as to the false charges laid against us by that English knight, at whose accusation, he said; my brother was like to be sent forthwith to London."

Symonds now regarded her with something of the same surprise and expectancy with which she had lately regarded him. Why Lawrence should have told her anything of this he could not imagine. From

his late confederate, however, he now derived a hint : it was, to throw the odium of all that befell O'Connor on D'Esterre; and to take on himself the merit, not only of convicting the treacherous Lawrence, but of acting in opposition to the more influential Sir Guy, whom he was all the more disposed to calumniate since he drew from the lady's emotion a warrant for the suspicion that Lawrence had expressed, of her predilection in his favour.

"Alas!" he said, "it is but too true. The measures must be timely that can save the heir of the O'Connor of Fitzclare."

"What are those measures to be?" she demanded, in trembling anxiety.

"On that, lady," replied Symonds, looking intently on the floor, "we shall, with your permission, confer on another day. Meantime I shall not rest in your cause. The first object to be effected by you, or your father, is to put a stop to the further plots of the traitor, Lawrence. While he lives, you can know no safety."

"Lives! Blessed Saviour! would you have him put to death with all his crimes on his head?"

A smile lurked in the corner of his mouth as Symonds answered—

“Piety is shocked at such a deed : but the people of God in old time were ordered to kill their brethren on the spot who were guilty of any offence.”

“Is that your doctrine?” said Hilda, as her eyes flashed upon him ; but, with a painful consciousness of being by necessity bound to action with him, she added—

“I will see to it that he is put out of the way of wronging us more. Our laws afford no security to the traitor, and what you say is in accordance with them.”

So saying, she rose from her seat, and, not forgetting her stateliness in her anxiety, she saluted him in a manner that expressed the audience to be ended.

CHAPTER XV.

SYMONDS, satisfied above his expectation with the turn affairs had taken, and the result of chances he had so well made use of, deemed it wiser and safer to leave them in such good train, and depart without risking an interview with O'Connor, or braving the desperate Lawrence. Hilda, he saw, implicitly believed him; his narrative was by chance too well connected with that of Lawrence to excite her doubts; and her very fear of inclining to the calumniated D'Esterre, even in heart, caused her to be the more easy dupe of those deceivers.

Unaware of this hidden ally in her secret heart, Symonds began to fear her less, and to assure himself of the facility with which he could beguile her further. Of such a

nature as hers he was one to stand in awe ; one more disposed to admire and fear a mind so pure, noble, and clear in its perceptions, than to love, or seek communion with it. But now, he believed the fair Hilda to be formed in a weaker mould than he had supposed, and the discovery was very pleasing to him. He would not risk the advantage he had gained by seeking another interview with her, but—contenting himself with a brief message sent by the nurse, which she might understand to signify that his hasty departure was on purpose to watch over the interests of O'Connor at the English Pale, and that he tacitly left the conduct of the other matters they had discussed to her direction—he departed the next morning at an early hour.

The evening of the following day Lawrence was on his return to the fortress. A thunder-storm on such a coast as he had to travel produces generally magnificent effects. The lightning, striking in vain on the dark adamantine rocks ; the reverberating sounds of thunder pealing through them ; the gloomy dash of the swollen waves, reflecting the hues of the angry sky, are in them-

selves calculated to impress solemnity on the mind. But Lawrence, as he cowered in a cavern scooped within a mighty rock, shrank from the lightning flash that illuminated its gloom as the wicked may shrink from the light of truth, that makes manifest their works of darkness.

Strange to say, that man, deceitful, false, vowed to cruelty and blood, as he was, was still far from being an infidel; whether he might best be styled religious or superstitious, still he was a believer: a believer not only in our common creed, but in the declaration of Holy Writ, that "the recompense of a man's hands shall be given unto him." In his ignorance he put evil for good, and persuaded himself, or rather suffered another to persuade him, that he was pursuing a sacred end,—dedicating himself to a righteous vocation,—when he wearied and vexed his soul in efforts to accomplish the vow he had undertaken.

But now, as he lurked within the gloomy cavern, there was something in the lightning's flash, something in the thunder's roar, that seemed to reveal his soul in some de-

gree to himself, as it must be revealed at the last to the light of Heaven. At other times he had asked forgiveness in his prayers of Heaven, of his mother, too, for the lack of determination he felt in fulfilling his vow ; but now, involuntarily, he found himself praying for forgiveness for having taken the vow,—repenting of what he had done towards performing it.

The storm, short as it was violent, passed away ; the western sun darted strongly from the large, many-coloured clouds. Lawrence approached the entrance of the cave, and rested there a minute's space—it was not longer before he started to hear his name pronounced.

“Lawrence!” said a voice which his disturbed mind might imagine to come from Heaven. He looked round ; no one was visible, but the voice again, and nearer to him, said—“Lawrence!” and it was a voice of sorrow and reproach, yet full of gentle pity. He crossed himself, and muttered a prayer ; then, bending forward, he saw above him on the rock a form that might seem to him like that of the blessed Mary, for whom, all fallen and wretched as he was, he still felt reverence.

The white mantle, falling from her shoulders, caught the sunbeams' watery lustre ; and round her head that same radiance gleamed which had dazzled Symonds on another occasion. It was to the eyes of Lawrence the glory playing round the cross that rested on the head of her to whom, not long before, his prayer had been addressed.

But Hilda was still of mortal mould ; she had been watching for him, and was now emerging from a similar cave on a higher rock, from whence she had seen him, though he could not see her.

Unconscious of the effect his fancy produced, she stood thus before him, and repeated his name in the same thrilling tone. He cowered before her, only slowly recovering from his superstitious fantasy.

"Lawrence," said Hilda, "your treachery is known, and I come to warn you of the fact! If you return to yonder hall, you know well your death will be as lawful as it will be instant. I come to charge you, as you will one day have to answer at Christ's bar, to do one of two things. Go on to

O'Connor's hall ; seek open satisfaction, if you can find it, and die the death of a traitor when it is found,—or else, turn back on your path ! Seek absolution from your wicked oath, and live to repent—live in penitence, and I will join my prayers daily to yours, and pray our dear Lord, who forgave His murderers, to forgive you also !”

“You know my oath, lady !” said the man, after a long silence. “What was it ?”

“To destroy O'Connor of Fitzclare and his race, as I have been told.”

“And you, who are of them, came forth here to meet and tell me this alone !”

“I thought not of that : I thought only of the body and soul that must miserably perish, if I came not,” she calmly answered. “Farewell ; we meet not again. Let your choice be made, and your part taken.”

She drew back, and rapidly disappeared among the rocks. He stood gazing upward to the spot where she had been, then turned from the fortress, to which he had been advancing, and took his way in the opposite direction.

The departure of Lawrence was a fortuitous event for Symonds : all affairs seemed to combine in furtherance of his wishes : even had he been forced to confront the traitor, who had so recently been his confederate, the fact that he had brought to the Lord Marshal the ring and message from O'Connor's prisoner was sufficient evidence against him ; while, against himself, Lawrence had been carefully left without the least means of proving any testimony he might be tempted to give.

It was, therefore, with what he considered a clear mind—that is, not a misgiving or apprehensive one—that this man revisited the fortress ; where the first news that met him on entering the hall was that of the discovered treachery and consequent desertion of Lawrence.

Hilda would have no secrets between Symonds and herself: she had, therefore, related to her father the entire of what he had detailed to her.

After a more prolonged absence than he had expected, the chief returned home, to receive this strange narrative, and learn

the additional danger he had run from a secret enemy within his house.

"It is strange," he said, musingly, "and haunts me like some memory of another life, that I have seen the face of this Lawrence years ago : yet he is young, and the time appears to me long past when the same face, in full maturity, has looked upon me in the same manner as I have often seen that of Lawrence do."

"Has there not been a hereditary feud, father, of which I have heard you speak, before all those troubles began which have so diverted you from other thoughts?"

"St. Patrick !" cried O'Connor, starting to his feet,— "he is Roger Mac Mahon's son—there was one, I heard—a child, left alive !"

He uttered a heavy groan, and, sinking back on his seat, pressed his hands on his broad forehead.

His daughter drew close to him ; bent over his head, as she stood, and said—

"Father !"

"O God ! leave me not childless !" he groaned, clasping her in his arms. "I am

content not to live out half my days :—that was a part of the burden her curse laid upon me ; but let not the other be fulfilled—let my children live after me !”

“ What is this, father ?—hide it not from me,” said Hilda.

“ It passed before your time, my child—it was when my own blood was hotter, and that of your uncle still more so—I love not now to speak or to think of that time. Enough it is to say, that, of the whole family who met and fought with us, only the mother and an infant survived. Years afterwards, when I was riding at nightfall in a solitary place, a witch-like woman stood above me on a bank, and predicted my fate. Sorrow and loss, treachery and final want ; to be left without wife or child, houseless, landless, and friendless—and to die as the man of blood should die, before my time had come—was the doom she uttered. It may be all fulfilled, Hilda,—my wife and my eldest son have gone ; my second soon may go—and then——” He laid his large hand upon her neck, and a heavy tear fell down upon his rough cheek.

Hilda's soft lips kissed it off. It was a tear of penitence, and doubly precious to her. She knew her father had done many a penitential act in bitter remembrance of the sin of his youth.

"But this man, my father—this Lawrence—if he were indeed the surviving Mac Mahon, and should have come here, what you have done is the recompense of his treachery."

"Bid him, if he would, to slay me on the spot, openly, honestly,—but to take his mother's curse from my children."

"Would you not, then, have caused him to die for his crime against you?"

"Hilda, I cling still to the old religion : hear what I tell you. When first I confessed myself after that fearful night when the Mac Mahons fell, Father Eustace refused me absolution, because I justified my conduct by asserting my brother's wrongs : he then desired me to think of Christ's words—'If thy enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink.' Father Eustace may hear Christ's words now, Hilda ; but if he can hear mine, he will know that I would, this moment, fulfil that saying to the last of

the Mac Mahons.—Yes ! be this Lawrence what he may—I would not shed his blood. We ought to send him out from among us unscathed, save by the worm in his own conscience.”

“ Father,” said Hilda, softly, “ forgive your child for having misjudged you.”

And then her last secret was told, and her interposition with regard to the wretched man made known.

“ A second time !” said O'Connor. “ In respect to the Saxon you had reason, Hilda ; for even now I would to Heaven we could have otherwise disposed of him, for to Saxon honour I trusted but little ; this Lawrence, however, is one of ourselves, and might have understood a generous action.”

“ Master Symonds is a Saxon, father.”

“ As such I love him not : but, my child,” O'Connor hesitated before he added—“ I know he loves you—has long loved you. That accounts to me for a zeal in our service that might otherwise appear unwarranted. He is labouring for your brother's release, Hilda ; he has already obtained the delay, if not the abandonment, of proceedings against me.”

Hilda trembled : her father's manner, his look, the tone of his voice, told her that there had been some previous communication between him and Symonds. Could it be that that man would renew his suit, and that he would listen to it as the price of the good offices he spoke of?

"He will deserve and meet our gratitude," she said, "if this be so ; but a love so long rejected has, I trust, long ere this grown cold and dead."

O'Connor was silent ; he had, in fact, agreed with Symonds that this old love was not to be pleaded anew until its fair object were more prepared to listen to it, which the latter well knew would only be effected by the pressure of her father's affairs, and a sense of the danger of her brother's position. His purpose was to win O'Connor to his side, by holding out hopes and projects which must afterwards appear to depend on the consent of his daughter to be his wife.

Something of this kind passed between them before the previous visit of Symonds to the fortress : he had come there after having conversed with O'Connor, and from perceiving, on his part, a sort of fear of rejecting

his services, on which he expected to be able to work. Fearful that Lawrence would not combine in his present purpose, he had determined to work on his fears by threats of revealing that trick of his own devising, by which he had obtained the ring which he had conveyed in the name of its owner to the Lord Marshal ; and which Symonds had succeeded in getting possession of on pretence of the expediency of having its ownership acknowledged by the O'Connors. The precipitancy with which their confederacy had closed, rendered all such schemes needless ; and successive accidents in his favour cleared the way he had meant only to feel, in so far as to enable him to walk on with unexpected ease to an end that became still more the object of desire, since he had seen Hilda in the pride of early womanhood, and found the sordid avarice that had prompted his pursuit of the young girl had become mingled with a fierce passion for the pure and lofty-minded woman. It was a passion that partook as much of the nature of revenge as love : a union with him, he well knew, would be misery to her, but for that he cared

little, if he thought at all. He should have triumphed over her former scorn, her former girlish mockery ; her father's lands would then be hers ; for though the release of her brother was to be the condition of their marriage, it may be easily understood that such a man would find abundant means whereby the fate of Morven should be made dependent on persons or circumstances beyond the reach of his influence.

To draw O'Connor more deeply and readily into his scheme, he had indited for him the letter which the young man received in prison in the manner already related. The chief, not having made much progress in the art of writing, allowed him to be the scribe ; and though, when read over to him, he thought the subject of his daughter's marriage was much more positively asserted than the stage of proceedings justly warranted, he was easily persuaded by the writer that the consolation the prospect of safety and freedom would afford to his son more than compensated for thus forestalling a statement that would in all probability soon be verified.

O'Connor, racked by anxiety, and broken

in spirit, weakly yielded to the plea, and thus gave Symonds a double advantage,—the appearance of having given his consent, and the admission into his own mind of the probability of finally doing so. Symonds, nevertheless, by a distant and almost reverential demeanour, sought to allay Hilda's suspicions, and prevent the rising of a spirit he had reason to fear.

Her father's silence, his reserve towards herself—the first he had ever maintained—caused her a keen pain, the more acutely felt because she imagined that the decisive part she had acted in respect to the wounded knight, who had proved the cause of their fresh troubles, had been the means of chilling the affection he had formerly so warmly shown her.

It was when, with this belief pressing sorely on an already anxious mind, Hilda had seated herself in the great black oak chair in the apartment which in the olden time would have borne the inappropriately sounding title of the "Lady's Bower," that her musings were broken off by the fairy-spring step of little Isabel, whose sylph-like

form dropped light, as if it descended by wings, on the same wide and cumbrous chair.

Whether it had been that the elder lady's deeper thoughts caused her unintentionally to withdraw from the constant society of the child-like girl, or that the pettish humour, and, at times, passionate grief of the latter, rendered the society of her hand-maidens, and their warm and clamorous condolences, more desirable: the result had been, that Hilda and Isabel had been of late more divided than had ever before been the case since they had first met.

Now, with her pretty face dimpled with joy, the little girl threw her soft arms around her neck, and nestled there, lifting up her eyes with the old laughing, loving gaze, like that of the playful child to its mother, to which Hilda was so well accustomed.

The loss of one friend—fancied or real—makes the possession of another the more precious: she bent her head to meet the upturned face.

“Come back to me, my child?—thou art happy now, sweet Isabel.”

“And you—and all—we shall all be happy soon!”

“Alackaday!” sighed Hilda, “why are we not always children? Dear one, the cloud that is so black to me has turned its white side to you.”

“Most grave lady,” said Isabel, shaking her little head, “I marvel much what spell has been cast over you ever since that wicked knight—who, trust me, I believe to have been an imp of darkness in disguise—vanished so strangely from your hold. You ever like to look on the darker side of things.”

“Nay, little slanderer, I look not on dark things now, for I look on this bright face.”

“But tell me, Hilda,—you trust him; do you not?”

“Him! whom?—who is there left to trust?”

“Why, your lov—— Nay, I will not say that; I was desired not to call him so;—but I know all about it, most sly Hilda.”

“Of what speak you, child?”

“Honor has told me somewhat, and he himself has told me more,” said the little

babbler, with the air of a child telling the secrets it was desired to conceal."

"Of what?" repeated the listener.

"Of your true knight,—not that false one,—but he who, like the true knights of old, who took the cross in honour of our Lady and their true love, vowed himself years ago to your service, and has gone about the world ever since in your defence. It is not a romance, Hilda; it is true; he has himself told me of the dangers he has run from that terrible woman over the seas, and her executioners;—it would make your blood creep to hear of it all;—and this was to save the O'Connor, and you, and Morven, and, mayhap, myself too, for—but do not be jealous, Hilda,—he can give me sweet looks oft-times, and praises me much. Nevertheless, I like not those eyes—they see two ways at once. In good sooth, it seems that they are looking for you while they are gazing on me."

"Has Master Symonds held converse with you, Isabel?" said Hilda.

"Know you not that? Honor said you were well pleased that I should entertain

him with my lighter talk when weightier matters engaged you."

"And did he tell you to inform me of the matter of his talk?"

"No, no! he said he did not desire to gain your favour by recounting his acts of service,—that he wished you not to know of them; that what he did was for love, and not for reward. So I am not to tell you, Hilda, what he is going to do."

"Be silent then, my child," said the other, gravely.

But Isabel, raising her head to a level with hers, whispered, while her lips almost at the instant pressed a delighted kiss on her cheek,—“He is going to set Morven free!”

Hilda started, as the words, with the soft breath of the whisperer, who seemed to deem a whispered secret to be still untold, passed to her ear.

They conveyed to her a mingled sensation, in which gratitude and joy were blent with a heavy but indistinct presage of ill. It was good news heard by one who even from them foreboded evil.

“God grant him grace!” was all her reply.

CHAPTER XVI.

WE left Sir Guy and Morven O'Connor in an awkward and disagreeable position. The length of time that elapsed without an answer to his application to the Earl of Essex tended not a little to the irritation of the former, while it afforded ground for the light sarcasms of his younger comrade, who found in it sufficient warrant for railing against the cold-heartedness of the Saxon race.

At length, it chanced that one morning when Sir Guy, having spent part of the night in enjoying the pleasures of a wonderful romance lent to him by the keeper, slept much later than customary, he was gradually aroused by a voice that muttered broken and only half audible sentences be-

side his couch ; of these the words—"rash youth—random love affair—all folly—must be cleared," were some of those most distinct to him. He rose, and saw his old friend, Anster, standing a little at the back of his head, so as to be able to see him without being seen.

"So, boy, with all that discreetness of thine, thou art in a hobble at last!"

"And desire to be well out of it," cried Guy.

"Would not get into it again for all the yellow-headed damsels of cursed Ireland—eh? I trow not, Guy ; there are fairer and better, and less dangerous ones, to be had at our side of the water."

"Your meaning, worthy friend, passes my shallow comprehension," said the other, shaking his head in token of its incapacity of understanding. He saw the old officer was accompanied by the courtier, John Harrington.

"Well done, Guy ; keep good faith, above all when it is pledged to a fair dame. Even her Grace, though she loves not to hear of the love matters of other folk, would hold

thee but an arrant knave were it otherwise," —the latter interposed laughingly.

D'Esterre coloured, but looked, as he felt, amazed to find the circumstances of his late adventure, of which he believed Hilda alone to be cognisant, had thus become known.

"But hear me, lad," continued Anster, more seriously, as he saw Guy was about to offer an explanation, "you must not affect that shallowness of comprehension when Essex confers with you. He has got the whole and true account from those who bear you good-will, and it is one that touches less dangerous matter than the report the Lord Marshal has given."

A light began to dawn on the prisoner's understanding : Essex was devising another version of his late affair.

"And what," said he, "has been the report that has reached the Queen?"

"Simply that you, Sir Guy D'Esterre, serving with the army in the realm of Ireland against those factious rebels, had formed an alliance with some of them, whereby the troop you had in command was surprised

and cut off, and the booty they were carrying rescued ;—that you had entered into friendly relations with the brother of the rebel O'More, and been absent from the camp for some weeks, which time you were known to have spent in that man's fortress, although you denied, or refused to give any account of the fact."

D'Esterre looked very grave, as he saw how much might be worked up from a little.

"That report," he said, "has but one fault—it is false."

"The true, which should have no fault, is hard to come at," answered Harrington, "but, now that the matter hath a little blown over, and passed from her Grace's observation, the real case will be more easily pardoned."

"And what may that case be?"

"Why Essex hath it that you had been enticed by the wiles of one of the damsels of the Irishry to enter her father's castle, where he in vengeance held you in durance, till the fair lady granted your release on your parole of honour never to betray her name; but he learns that no wrong to her

Highness, on one side or the other, was intended.

“So far, so true,” said Guy, thinking of the mixture of truth and untruth in both reports. That the latter was simply an invention of Essex, and the truth it contained a chance such as often occurs, he readily guessed. He only remarked, in answer, that Essex had taken a moderate portion of time in ascertaining the facts he now heard of.

“Essex hath his own matters to care for as well as thine,” the other rejoined, with a meaning look. The good Earl hath had a sore sickness on him but lately, and as the physicianers kept aloof, he was fain to bear it as he might ; until the sun of that countenance, which he sweareth can be his sole medicine and nourishment, rose upon him again, and set him on his feet.”

A peevish expression at the degradation to which the young lord submitted in his pretended love to his old Queen, was D'Essterre's comment on this speech. His visitor then added,—

“He had but left his chamber, and re-

sumed his office at the court, when he encountered the Irish varlet who had ventured to that unknown region from his own vile bogs, to tell her Highness, as he said, the truth of your affair."

Again D'Esterre found himself bewildered, and hastily inquired of whom he now spoke.

"In truth I know not : an Irish Mercury belike ; seeing he had neither wings to fly nor legs to run, yet came as Cupid's messenger !"

"I pray you leave off riddles," cried Guy almost angrily ; "when grave matters are in hand, such speech is idle !"

"I saw the fellow, but I know him not ; he was one that would not have furthered thy cause with her Grace, seeing he was a misshapen knave, with legs not so long as to my knee, and a body somewhat longer than thy own.

"Lawrence !" shouted Morven from his pallet, where he had lain, utterly forgotten by his prison comrade.

"Whom have you there, Guy ?" asked Harrington, in a lower voice.

“The brother — I mean the son” — he stopped without expressing exactly what he meant.

“Soh! inarry, it will work to a romance!” said the other, comprehending whose brother he would have said.

But Morven, raising himself up, and fixing his excited and flashing eyes on the stranger, angrily and even imperiously demanded to know the business on which a follower of his father, and one suspected to be a traitor to him, had come to the English Court.

“Heed not his lack of courtesy,” said Guy, speaking to Harrington so as not to be overheard; “the youth has much care, and has suffered much wrong.”

“I gave but scant attention to his matter,” Harrington resumed. “If I remember me aright, the tale he told was of this sort:— He had learned that Sir Guy D’Esterre was in jeopardy, and found that a man, who was a rival of his for the affections or the wealth of the damsel who had brought him into trouble, was plotting to keep him out of the way until he had, by vilifying his rival, won her from him by means of pretended ser-

vices. My lord of Essex heard more from this fellow than I have learned, the time being passed when love-passages gave me matter of interest."

A low but fierce growl told of the gathering rage of Morven O'Connor, which Harrington perceiving, hastily added,—

"That man seemed anxious to obtain the speedy release of Sir Guy, in order that his reappearance might frustrate the scheme of some base knave whose intrigues hath sent him hither. He said he owed the fair lady a service, and would willingly pay it at the expense of the false villain who was her suitor. And so, young sir," he concluded, with a bow to the frowning Morven, "under your favour, shall I end the tale I had to tell."

And, carelessly turning away, he drew D'Esterre to a distant recess, and, assuming another manner, asked him some questions concerning his own affair. D'Esterre gave him the account of his misadventure which he had formerly given to the Lord Marshal, and which was the truth, although a part of the truth was reserved: he would neither accuse O'Connor of forcibly detaining him,

nor mention a name, to his ignorance of which he partly ascribed his release. But the falsity of the charges brought against him he declared himself anxious to prove.

“Hold thy peace, Sir Guy ; matters are now in train : put not thy neck in the keeping of the Queen’s Attorney !”

“But my honour is belied !”

“Pah ! who is there now-a-days who has not a spot of treason on his jerkin ? Why, man, if you are to be known at Court, you must be a lover or a traitor ;—in good troth I jest not. Gray hairs and beardless chins must keep on their owner’s shoulders by the same means ; the old lady is fractious, and the young man froward—it is ever a caress and a blow—a blow and a caress. Heaven save us from such love-making. The Irish tigress who chained you in her father’s den were no whit more to be feared in such a case than the British lion.”

“Prison walls, they say, have ears,” said Guy. “Tell me rather, I pray you, how my own matters are likely to speed. The long sickness of our gallant Earl has, haply, passed.”

“Know you how it was caused?” said the other, in a whisper—“By a sound box on the ear!”

D'Esterre opened his eyes with a kindling glance.

“You look bravely fierce,” most valorous knight: “aye, and so did Cadiz look, towering in wrath.”

“And he took the blow!—from a woman’s hand!”

“Why there was the mischief of it all: he forgot whether she was a man or woman, and pulled out his sword instead of kissing the hand that smote him.”

“Cadiz! Cadiz!” sighed Sir Guy.

“You leaped from its walls after the banner of Essex,” said the other.

“That noble and gallant spirit!” Guy continued, in a saddened manner—“chained, degraded, smothered, by its own ambition! Oh! leave me, Fortune, but a free mind and a free path, and, though penniless in the world, I would shun the tainted atmosphere that has poisoned the life-springs of such a noble heart!”

“Bravely spoken, good knight; but be

not over confident. We shall have thee to Court speedily, and thou wilt then sue to me for a love-sonnet if thou cannot frame one thyself. I must begone now; time speeds apace. Tell me, ere I go, who is that wild youth yonder, and wherefore is he here?"

Guy briefly, but warmly, related the circumstances of young Morven. They were listened to with an interest that surprised him; and when he had ended, Harrington departed, with a promise that he should shortly hear from, or see, some other friends.

Amused, even amid his annoyance, at the turn which had now been given to his connexion with his family, D'Esterre felt some awkwardness in approaching Morven, whose sentiments, respecting the singular proceedings of Lawrence, he was curious to learn. But the youth, stretched on his face, with hands clasped on the back of his head, affected a state of such heavy slumber that, after once or twice calling him, he saw he was obstinately bent on avoiding discourse, or was, perhaps, still under the influence of the anger which Harrington's jests had excited.

That moody or angry humour continued through the day in a temper the less wayward and susceptible Englishman could ill understand ; the petulant Hibernian gave himself up to a morbid state of feeling, which the slightest word only seemed to irritate ; so that D'Esterre, finally yielding him to its indulgence, applied himself to the wonderful romance that had occupied him on the proceeding night, for relief from the reflections that only plunged him into further perplexity.

Thus dragged on the leaden-winged hours, and his heart sickened as he thought of the many who were even then languishing out years, as he did hours or days, in hopeless captivity.

“ And can such a lot be preferable to the stroke of the axe-man ? ” he asked himself. “ Yet to it is not the brother of the Queen consigned, since he boldly dared her to shed her kindred blood ? Strange is that love of life—life dragged out to its utmost limit of helplessness—life pined out by inches within the bars of a dungeon ! Methinks, were I in Perrot's place, I should claim the privilege of dying rather than of living ! ”

And for what a mere trifle, an absolute nothing, was he himself forced to learn by experience what must be the wretched state of high-minded men, of gentle-hearted women, condemned—

“Like things within the cold rock found
Alive, while all's congealed around”—

to a dreary, hopeless imprisonment.

Thus returning, as perhaps the captive ever does, to himself, Guy finally turned his thoughts to the singular intelligence he had received from his morning visitor.

The visit of Lawrence to England and to its Court was inexplicable. Morven supposed him to be a traitor to the chief he served; but such information as he had given to Essex did not savour of treason to O'Connor, or rather, to O'Connor's daughter. Might it not be—was his next idea—that he was the messenger of the latter?—that, having learned the disgrace which had befallen himself, Hilda, true to the character he had already perceived, had thus boldly sought to bring the truth to the ears of Elizabeth.

Sir Guy ruminated on this possibility until he had almost turned it into a fact.

But while, with limbs stretched out to their full length, an arm on his rude table, and a hand buried in his thick chestnut hair, he was thus, by a combination of ideas—

“Chewing the cud of sweet and bitter phantasy”—

a wild burst of song, breaking the deep silence of the prison chamber, caused him to start to his feet.

“You are merry of a sudden, Master Morven,” he said, annoyed at having been so discomposed. “Methought you had matter for care just now?”

“Care?—hang it; drown it; put it to any end that pleases you,” cried the youth, passing from melancholy to mirth, as the transition of a moment. “I will think no more. You, sir knight, are a Saxon,—I fight on the other side: we both fare alike, share the same prison, mayhap shall share the same block!”

“Or, by an equal chance, may have our honour restored,” said Guy.

“Restored! that can hardly be restored which never has been lost,” returned Morven; if you, sir knight, feel the need of seeking for lost honour—”

D'Esterre turned upon the speaker a look, which, rash as he was, stopped him in his speech. The colour that mounted to the cheek of the youth pleaded his apology with one who was at that moment less disposed than usual to quarrel with the wild brother of Hilda Fitzclare.

“The honour that is doubted, Morven,” he said, “is accounted to be lost.”

There was an unusual tone of melancholy in the voice that uttered these words, and that tone at once found its way to the sensitive heart of the young Irishman.

“Tell me,” he said, “on your word as a true knight, have I wrongfully doubted your honour, when I believed till now, that the narrative that stranger gave this morn, touching your late affair with my family, was the true one?”

“ You did me wrong,” replied Guy, turning his eyes full upon him. “ I am here for no cause, that I know of, but that which I truly told you when we first met. I never beheld your sister until I was recovered from my wound. As to being bound not to reveal your father’s name, that part of the story is true, and the rack itself should not force me to break my word; and that for its own worth’s sake, as well as for hers to whom it was pledged. And now that we speak once more on this matter, I will declare to you, Master Morven, that, belied and ill-treated as it has been my hap to be, no disgrace, even, that could fall on myself, would be so sorely felt as the thought that, through me or by my fault, the shadow of dishonour should fall on your true-hearted sister’s name! Let it, I pray you, not be named between us, at least in relation to such unseemly and untrue reports; and though it is not like to be my fair fortune ever to see her face again, I would that she and all others should know, that neither father, brother, friend, nor lover, would more freely

draw sword in defence of her honour than would I !”

A hand was pressed upon his shoulder, another grasped his own ; Morven's excited eyes, shining through dew, looked into the steady, full-opened, truth-telling eyes of the speaker.

“Guy,” he said, dismissing the formal title, “I doubt you no more : henceforth we are friends.”

“You told me that when first we met, good friend : you shift your humour too often and easily, Morven !”

“I know it. It is my country's fault : mine is the land of the flitting cloud and passing sunshine — my temper is of like complexion, with a whirl of the tempest mingled therewith. It is pity, Guy, that the cold-blooded English and hot-blooded Irish agree not better : methinks a mingling of the races might produce a more moderate temperature. By the mass, good knight, I am tempted to give thee my petulant, froward, yet loving little Isabel, to be a fitting mate for one so cool and passion-free as yourself ; and to seek a cold and careful Saxon dame,

whom I will take to wife as men take an ice-lump to cool hot liquors !”

“ Neither fair lady might well be pleased to hear your speech,” said Guy, “ and truly so blithe a maiden as Mistress Isabel would find me as sorry a mate as I should find her an ill-matched wife. The doctors tell us that without affinity of the elements there can be no identity ; so that if holy Church should make two diverse minds into one by outward union, the effect would be but as the mingling of fire and water !”

“ Are you wedded already, or have you only a lady-love ?” asked Morven ; “ in either case, the lady I trow, has small cause of jealousy.”

“ Neither case is mine at this present moment,” the other answered, with a smile, “ and for all I can see, may not ever be. If I wed, trust me it will be with one whose heart I can love, and whose pure and lofty mind I can revere. She shall be as good as fair, and as wise as good :—such a lovely and noble dame as I can worship and serve all the days of my life in honour and truth.

Such a one may not incline to me, but to none save such will I ever incline."

Morven remained silent some time, and then said carelessly,—

"My little Will-o'-the-wisp will not do for you, Guy ; I must keep her myself, if haply she has not ere this found a more fortunate love."

CHAPTER XVII.

O'CONNOR of Fitzclare was pacing moodily the rocky floor of his rude hall ; the retainers were absent, and the storm that raged without caused him to exchange his customary patrol-like walk on the cliff for that equally meditative one within his fortress. Quick and light as the descent of the sea-bird on that rock, his daughter appeared at his side ; one hand fastened on his arm, the other extended backwards to a form that more slowly and heavily followed hers.

“ He says,” murmured Hilda, speaking as if the words choked her—“ he says that *you* bade him urge again his audacious suit. It is not true ?—say it is not true !”

O'Connor turned towards the advancing

figure of Symonds, who, with a curious mixture of self-assurance and mortification, followed at a distance the floating form of the indignant Hilda. Pointing to him with a finger, with sparkling eyes and flushing cheek, she repeated—

“It is not true?—say it is not true!”

But she raised those anger-sparkling eyes to the chieftain's face, and the look of shame, of sorrow, that she there beheld, was enough for her.

“My father!” she murmured, as she wove her light arms round his huge figure, lifting her beautiful eyes to his—“my father, can it be?”

A groan heaved the chieftain's frame:—

“Not for my sake—no!” he murmured—
“but, child, thy mother would have died for thee—for thy brother!”

“And I also,” cried Hilda; raising up her head, and, standing erect with flashing eyes, she boldly turned to Symonds, and said, “Ask me to die only, and I am ready with God's help to do so—but not to marry him—to die to save another would not be sin; to marry so would be sin and shame.”

“Go,” said the chieftain, waving his hand to the suitor, who with compressed lips stood darkly eyeing him, and watching the storm-clouds that seemed to sweep over his working countenance—“Go, it is ended ; Hilda Fitzclare will die with her brother rather than be the wife of the Saxon.”

“Sir Guy D'Esterre will vow he thinks otherwise,” replied Symonds, with a cold sneer : but his eyes fell before the full gaze of those that looked into them for a moment ; and then, with an expression of the deepest scorn, Hilda slowly left the hall.

She went not far : seated on a ledge of rock, while the cold autumnal wind blew wildly around her, she leaned her pale face on her hands, and tears, woman's best relief, fell through the white fingers.

The reptile we despise can cause us bitter pain. The sting the human tongue inflicts is sometimes not the less felt because the being from whom it comes is the object of our contempt.

Feminine indignation and anger, perhaps, still more than apprehension for her brother or herself, were the source of Hilda's heavy

tears; for the sarcasm of Symonds, if not productive of the effect he meant it to have produced, was felt by her as proud and susceptible woman feels the very shadow of such an implication as that it conveyed.

What a train of troubles had an occurrence so trivial in itself led her into ! But, whatever way she might try to free herself and her family from them, that way should not be by marriage : any sacrifice might be made save one, so revolting to womanly feeling, so contrary to the precepts of religion as well as nature. That Sir Guy D'Esterre was not false, Hilda in her secret heart believed ; but what could his conduct have to do with her's in such a case as this ? Had she even loved him, and been slighted in return,—could that be a reason for wedding another whom she loved not ?

Yet her cheek burned while these thoughts swept through her troubled mind, and a doubt came now, still more painfully, to mingle with them ; the doubt that the tenacity with which she clung to the belief that the English knight, though he came not, sent not, to satisfy her of his truth, was

still true to honour and to his plighted word—might, if perceived by others, favour the taunting hints that Symonds had dared to throw out.

“I have done no wrong,” she repeated to herself—“thought no wrong. Heaven knows in what I did, not one thought of self ever mingled! I acted without advice, certainly, —too rashly, it may be, but as I thought a Christian should act by another in like case; and as I believed was the best and safest course for my father. Will God forsake those who do right, and suffer those who do wrong to prosper?”

Poor Hilda! the Psalmist had asked that question long before, and he had no answer until, in the sanctuary of Heaven, he understood the end of those men who here on the earth did wickedly, yet flourished like a green bay-tree.

She bowed her face on her hands, and, sitting there on the lofty rock, she prayed in her heart to our Father to deliver her from evil.

The day had been stormy; now the rain had ceased, and the wind fallen, but heavy

mists hung upon the coast : the sun had sunk in the west, and cast its parting light on a cloud that rested on the rocks nearly opposite to where she sat. The dark mass grew light ; it moved and rose as the air stirred and the light shone ; the centre was white and glistening ; the dark edges, less under the action of the sunbeam, circled it like a frame, within which the white moving mist gradually formed itself into a shape resembling that of a draped figure with an extended arm. Hilda looked up from her prayer to see this vision. To her already prepared mind, it appeared to bring her the answer she expected, the strength she required. The arm of the figure pointed eastward, in the direction her thoughts had taken.

“ My mother,” said the distressed maiden, “ wishes me to save her son—but not by means her pure soul would abhor ; my father wishes me to do so too, but alas ! his heart has grown weak : she shows me the path to take. Elizabeth of England, they say, bad as she is, loves justice. To her I will go—but not to her servitors in

this land. Elizabeth shall hear of the wrong they do ; and she may give me back my brother, or take my own miserable life !”

The cloud-figure softly dissolved, melting away in a brighter sunbeam ; the girl felt an angel's smile fall upon her heavy heart.

But the bold step she now projected, to be of any avail, must be taken at once ; and promptitude and decision were as prominent in Hilda's disposition as they were wanting in her father's.

The necessity of keeping her real purpose a secret from Symonds was apparent ; and in order that it might be so kept it was absolutely necessary that no one should know it save her old faithful nurse ; for not even her father could she trust, lest his incaution should cause an involuntary betrayal. It was, moreover, more than doubtful that she could obtain his consent to a project so wild. Yet she could not, would not, depart without his knowledge, without giving him some reason for absence. Various plans presented themselves,—one only appeared to be what she could willingly adopt. The

time of pilgrimages was not then, any more than it is now, at an end in the western isle; and the defeat of Bagnal and success of O'Neil having left the country clear for all such pious purposes, Hilda resolved not to make a mere excuse of such a purpose, but to repair to a sacred place, of which she had often heard her mother speak, and there to spend some hours in retirement and prayer before proceeding on her hazardous expedition. To obtain her father's consent to her performing this pilgrimage for her brother's sake, would, she knew, be easy, especially when the present state of the country was favourable to it.

There was, however, one difficulty that still presented itself. Canna must be the only depository of her secret, and she must have power to reveal it in the case that accident should befall her. Canna, therefore, must remain behind, and who, then, could accompany her? Must she go alone? That she dare not do; and, besides, she must have money and clothes for her journey. With a heavy sigh, she had almost resigned the project that had given her so much hope,

when she recollected that not far from a convent of St. Bridget was the house of her foster-brother, who would provide her with a horse, and attend her on her journey to Dublin, from whence she should sail for London. Canna could easily convey to him what things she required, and she had no fear of setting out as a solitary pilgrim to St. Bridget's.

With her plan arranged mentally, she hastened to seek for her faithful Canna; whose fears, or rather terrors, at her daring undertaking, were more than balanced by her admiration, and firm belief that it was the blessed Virgin herself that had appeared in the cloud to her, and inspired her with a resolution which she would crown with success.

Having arranged with her for the prosecution of the plan she had formed, Hilda considered it wiser to take her father—too much inclined to waver and halt between two opinions—by surprise, on the morrow, and only ask his consent and blessing when she was preparing to set out on her pilgrimage. And, all being decided upon,

she went to leave her nightly kiss with little Isabel, before she sought her rest.

Though it was not late, the girl was sleeping, in dreams, happier, poor bird, than waking hours might be. Her bright hair, left at liberty at night, half covered the soft cheek, on which the rosy hue flushed deeper beneath Hilda's kiss, as the sleeper's pouting, child-like lips parted with a murmured name—it was that of Morven.

The girl started, opened her eyes, and gazed in wonder at the unusually animated ones that bent over her.

“I meant not to wake thee, mavourneen; I would but have left thee a kiss, lest thou shouldst sleep late in the morning: for I go on a pilgrimage, Isabel—a pilgrimage for the sake of Morven!”

“Morven?” Isabel repeated, fixing her bright, newly opened eyes on the speaker's face,—“for Morven's sake!”—and, placing a hand on each of Hilda's shoulders, she sprung up and off the couch. “And you would have left me—his betrothed—behind!”

“Child!—how could you think of such a thing?—little one as thou art! Look at these tiny feet—to tread a weary way—that pretty fairy figure, to undergo toil, and brave rough weather!”

“For Morven’s sake,” repeated Isabel, making an effort to get on some attire. “Yes! these feet, if they are not as large as true Irish ones, could carry on a heart as true as any of pure Irish blood. Yes, for Morven’s sake they would tread on burning mountains; they would try to walk over flowing waves, if ‘for Morven’s sake’ were written as the signpost before them. O! most cruel Hilda, would you let it be said that his sister could do what his own betrothed would not do?”

“A sister’s love is strong, is deep,” sighed Hilda, as she looked earnestly, admiringly, at the childish maiden, whose heart in a short time was outgrowing its years, and deepening into the intensity of the feelings of womanhood. “But yet such love as this I never knew—never may know. O base and miserable Symonds, to try to force me to wed without it!”

"I, too, would have wished thee to do so," cried Isabel, throwing herself on her neck. "Love is a selfish, a dreadful thing, my Hilda,—you are greater, better, without it. It will sacrifice all, all to itself, to the one beloved!"

"Dear child," said Hilda, returning her caress. "You have felt much, and learned from feeling—you must pray, my Isabel, pray, and you will feel better, more wisely."

"You will take me with you, then! You will let me pray with you for *our* Morven's weal?"

She clung with her arms around the elder girl, pressing her cheek on her bosom, her dark eyes glancing through her gleaming and dishevelled hair up to the calmer countenance of Hilda, with the pretty coaxing smile of innocent childhood; and adding an emphasis to the word "*our*," that she thought must be soothing to the jealous love of the sister.

"Little coaxbox!—a woman and a child at once! But know you where I go, sweet one? It is to St. Bridget's of the Holy Cross."

"The haunted convent!" cried Isabel, lift-

ing up her head in terror. "O Hilda, would no other place be as good?"

"She does not say," thought Hilda, "that she would not come even there: strange as have been the tales she has heard of it. It is there I must go, love," she continued aloud; "for there I once promised my mother to go, and I never yet fulfilled the pledge I gave. You know it is there, they say, the faithless nun is seen. You know the story, dear?"

"Yes," Isabel said, shuddering. "Lights are seen constantly in that deserted convent; and they say a nun in white robes walks there, and even lights up the altars. It was in King Henry's time,"—continued the girl, whose fondness for the wonderful equalled her dread of the supernatural,—“it was in the time of that terribly bad King that a nun who liked the pleasures of the world—poor thing!—better than the holy duties of her convent—which was very wrong, of course, though it is natural too—left St. Bridget's, and, taking advantage of the disorders of the time, lived in the world just as gay as—as I might live myself.

Poor soul ! she got into some trouble, I suppose, or broke her leg, or something, that made her think how wrong it was to be merry-making ; and so she repented, and went to the priest, and confessed, and vowed from that time forth to perform double duty in St. Bridget's convent if the abbess would pardon her. The abbess agreed to pardon her if she kept her vow ; but when the poor penitent was on her way back to the convent, she died unpardoned, and the abbess did not know it ; and soon afterwards the convent was broken up, and the nuns all dispersed : but then there appeared a solitary in the white robe and veil of the order, and she is still seen at times in the dusk flitting about the deserted place, and at night a light is seen moving through the empty house. They say it is the ghost of the penitent nun now fulfilling the vow she made, and performing the service she left undone."

"Such is indeed the story," said Hilda, "and none can contradict it. Therefore, little trembler, must I go alone, since many would brave any danger rather than a spiritual one."

“I would indeed that we were not to see the ghost of the nun,” said Isabel; “but I could meet even a ghost if it were for Morven’s sake: so, my own sweet Hilda, I will share thy peril in order to share its reward.”

“So determined art thou! Ah! dear one, even still thou knowest not all. Listen, Isabel, thou art almost a woman grown—women, they say, cannot keep secrets—that is false, but for Morven’s sake thou wilt keep this—it is not solely to Heaven and its Powers that I meditate supplication.”

And, bending her loftier head, she whispered her real purpose in the ear of the little girl.

The colour sank from the soft cheek; the eyes seemed to lose their colour also: they looked dimly into the dark blue orbs that met them in calm resolve.

The name of Queen Elizabeth had been the bugbear of the girl’s infancy. After the terrible desolation which followed the rebellion of Desmond, that destructive period was honoured by the natives with the epithet of

the "Hag's War," and by that injurious epithet had the

"—— Fair Vestal thronéd in the West"

become known to the child, who, not knowing that it was high treason to doubt that the royal lady was less than a divine miracle of mortal perfection, always represented to herself the image of Elizabeth as a withered hag, whose palace-gates were adorned with human heads and grinning skulls; whose throne was surrounded with instruments of torture; and at whose feet was the dungeon wherein her victims were cast.

The ghost of the penitent nun was something far less frightful to her fancy than the actual bodily presence of this regal tyrant, and the young lady visibly shivered.

"At length she yields," said Hilda to herself, and only began to tremble for the safe keeping of her secret.

"For Morven's sake," murmured Isabel. "Ah! I thought not the sign-post I spoke of would point so far off. But no matter: we shall go together, Hilda, even to that

terrible Elizabeth ! They say she has had many loves—she knows not a sister's : she might not feel for thee ; but if she has loved, as they say, she may pity me, and not wish that so young a thing should die a widow ere she had become a bride."

" Whatever love she has known, she knows nought so pure, so devoted, as thine, my Isabel, my little rose ! opening into fuller fragrance, the keener and drearier blows the blast that might nip thy beauty," cried Hilda, caressing her bright locks. " Yes, my heart's child, the strength of thy love will carry thee on. We will set forth in company ; be patient, Isabel, and brave. Now rest thee well, for at dawn thou must arise."

With arms entwined, the young girls laid themselves down to sleep ; and Hilda, having come to a decision that gave rest to a long harassed mind, slept more calmly than had latterly been her wont.

At the dawn of light she rose, and imparted to her father the wish of herself and her young relation to make a pilgrimage to

the Holy Cross at St. Bridget's deserted convent.

The chieftain would not obstruct so pious a purpose ; nor was he sorry for any delay that tended necessarily to retard his daughter's decision as to the suit of Symonds.

"Tell him he shall have his answer on my return, and engage him to wait till then," was all she said on that subject.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE news of the intended pilgrimage spread quickly among the followers of Fitzclare ; and when the young pilgrims came out on the rock, clad in long gray cloaks, with white linen veils on their heads, and sandals only on their feet, they were surrounded by many of those faithful men, who stood around, beholding them with respect and veneration.

The girls advanced to the chief, and, kneeling before him, craved his blessing. With both broad palms stretched over their heads, the chieftain gave it, and then, with that stifled cry which it thrills the ear to hear issuing from a strong man's heart, he clasped his daughter to his breast, held her there a moment, and turning, plunged down a

projecting portion of the rock, hiding himself from sight.

At the point that commanded the road they were to take stood Symonds, evidently waiting to address them. With a low inclination they turned aside ; and he stood where they had passed, engaged in that singular occupation of disappointed men—biting the nail of his thumb. The chieftain had already referred him to their return as the time when Hilda's answer was to be given; and the sorely tried father stood looking upon her now, as with her little companion she descended the rocky stairs in her pilgrim attire, with much the same feelings that Jephthah might have witnessed the departure of his daughter to the mountains of Israel.

The successes of O'Neil had given Symonds cause to fear that his schemes might fail if their reward were delayed. The hold he had over the chieftain, in consequence of the detention of his son in London, was indeed his strongest point of hope. He did not think it unlikely that superstition might lead Hilda to take the means she

had now adopted of arriving at a decision on a doubtful matter; and while he sneered at it himself, he had some idea that a mind so high in tone as hers might be influenced by a pious sentiment to an act of self-sacrifice naturally repugnant to it.

The convent to which they were bound was scarcely a day's pilgrimage from the fortress, and the English soldiery having been drawn away to oppose the northern rebels, they reached it without adventure or molestation of any kind—the few people they met respecting their appearance and object.

It had been some years previously occupied by the sisters of the renowned St. Bridget, who was, for her first fifteen years, the contemporary of St. Patrick, as she is said to have been born A. D. 453, and he to have died A. D. 465. Overlaid as such actions as hers become by “the imaginations of men,” and the extraordinary endowment with miraculous powers with which the Church of Rome invests the memory of those who have simply been strong in faith and love, we are often careless in discerning the real among the fictitious; the true gold that

has been strangely covered with mere tinsel.*

In educating and cultivating a barbarous people emerging from paganism, this good woman took an active part. To relieving or maintaining poor or destitute Christians she devoted her life : her institutions combined both objects, and were at once schools and hospitals, or alms-houses. Such, indeed, was the character of all religious houses before the Invasion of the Normans gave them a grander style of architecture, together with a less active rule of life.

This convent, an offset of St. Bridget's rule, had been recently alienated with one still richer, and its possessions made over to one of the English adherents. Its vicissitudes had been many. In its earlier state repeatedly

* In ultra Protestant Sweden, the fame of *its* St. Bridget still remains; perpetuated by the remains of her great convent of Wadstena, on the shores of Lake Wettern. Though a later saint than her namesake of Ireland, and the mother of some renowned sons, the Irish Annals claim for their Bridget the same honours from Rome as those conferred on Bridget of Sweden.

sacked by the Danes, it had revived with their conversion, and again suffered from the Christian and Papal followers of Henry II. Passing over many another trial, it had been confiscated by Henry VIII., restored on the intercession of its Abbess by Queen Mary, and was finally alienated by Elizabeth, and despoiled by her unjust and rapacious servants.

It now presented a touching scene of desolation, more melancholy because the mellowing hand of time had not added grace and beauty to the vestiges of human havoc. Its situation was pleasant, though the hills or mountains that bounded the small landscape were barren and gloomy in aspect.

The convent and its appendages now appeared to stand in a green field, for both the approaches to it and the court round which the cloisters ran were thickly overgrown with grass. In the ruined garden a fountain still flung its waters over the weeds in which the Irish soil is at present so prolific. The west window of the church, which, having been built considerably after the era of

the Normans, was of a more imposing style of architecture than the convent, was entire, but the roof, either from violence or neglect, had partly fallen in, and the doorway beneath the window by which strangers had been admitted to the nave was rudely, but strongly, blocked up with large stones.

To the right of this church were the buildings of the convent; to the left was a small grove, one extremity of which was bounded by a narrow but deep and rapid stream, which rolled murmuringly by through some small masses of rocks. In this spot rose one of those curious Round Towers which, while they add a more peculiarly melancholy feature to the character of the country where they occur, seem placed there as monuments to show us that no age of its history leaves Ireland without its enigma.*

* These Towers alone might prove a standing refutation of such fabulous stories of Ireland's civilization and greatness before the Christian era as are given by Keating, O'Halloran, and others. Surely, from the same sources from which they derived such information, we might learn the purpose of these enigmatical Towers.

Beside this beautiful monument of a passed away religion—for that they are of Pagan origin there appears little doubt—there stood one more hopeful and touching to the Christian heart. A stone cross, beautifully sculptured on an elevated pedestal of three tiers, told of the faith which, however mankind might fight and destroy each other for its doctrines or its rites, was rooted in the immutable Rock which no change could overthrow.

Around this cross the earth was bare, though the grass grew high elsewhere. Our young pilgrims may explain the cause; for they, too, approached the spot, and, kneeling there, offered up their first prayers to the Saviour of all those who put their trust in Him—to Him who took their sorrows as well as sins upon Himself.

Long would Hilda Fitzclare have prayed there, for her heart was full, and her spirit weary and heavy laden: but she would fain have been alone, and little Isabel was faint with fatigue and want of refreshment. To look for a place of repose for her was Hilda's first care. The deserted cells offered a sufficiently quiet lodging, and thither she led the weary girl.

The long silent cloister they traversed without any hesitation or doubt ; but when they ascended the dark stone stair, and found themselves in the narrow and, it almost seemed, endless gallery, at each side of which were the doors, some lying open, some closed, of the empty cells recently inhabited by the sisters of this charitable house, even Hilda, strong in heart as she generally was, felt some emotion akin to dread. This gallery was nearly dark, for the twilight hour was insufficient to lighten it. They stopped, and Isabel, pressing hard the hand to which she clung, whispered an entreaty that they might descend to the large, now vacant, dormitory they had passed, situated exterior to this part of the convent, and which had been appropriated to the reception of houseless wanderers or destitute poor. There the plaint of pain, the groan of death, the voice of prayer, had once been heard. Now, all was still.

They were about to turn and retrace their way, when a sound, unusual and almost unearthly, rose up, faint yet distinct, and, as it were, from below the place on

which they stood. There is something even in the silence and emptiness of a deserted house that inclines the mind to imaginative, or what is called superstitious feeling. How much more strongly this sentiment might be experienced amid the desolation of a religious one, from whence the traces of its recent occupants have hardly passed away?

Drawing the trembler close to her side, Hilda leaned against the wall, supporting the more timid Isabel. Faint, weak, yet thrillingly and plaintively distinct, they heard the voice of the choir nun ascend in melancholy sweetness, and steal around them, enveloping them, as it were, in its spiritual harmony.

The hymn ceased ; the sound died away, and the death-like stillness of the place returned. But while the trembling girls still held their breath with awe, an apparition at the end of the darkened gallery renewed that sensation with redoubled force. A light gleamed upon the wall at that extremity; and when the light advanced, they saw, as if encircled in it and visibly revealed to them in their obscurity, the tall figure of

a white-robed nun, with long white veil flowing from her head. The light moved, the figure moved with it; then darkness came again, and they saw no more.

Half carrying the terror-stricken Isabel, Hilda hastily turned, and drew her along the passage in another direction to that they had been taking: a short staircase presented itself; and, without considering if it were the same they had come up by, they rapidly descended it, and found themselves in a large and now nearly dark room, over the floor of which were ranged in lines several rude couches, such as were commonly used at that day, and which still remained much as they had been left by the last poor occupants. This had been the dormitory for the sick or needy. Many of these houses, by their constitution, were obliged to have a certain number of beds always in readiness for the wayfaring, the distressed, or wounded, whom the casualties of the time might bring to the convent-door.

Scarcely had they entered this deserted dormitory, and leaned against the wall beside the door to regain their breath, when

their terror was renewed and augmented by seeing a light gleam along its further end, at which, also, another door led in an opposite direction. It spread rapidly on, and, before they were able to move from their position, the ghastly figure of the white nun appeared advancing through that opposite entrance. She carried in her hand a long rod, the end of which, being dipped in some inflammatory substance, shed a faint but glaring and unsteady light around herself as she moved through the airy passages,—but one insufficient to reveal to the person who bore it the objects that might be at a distance. Her other hand moved in the air, as if making the sign of benediction. Thus did the figure pass along each line of the empty couches, until, approaching directly opposite to the spot where even the stouter-hearted Hilda leaned, gasping with awe or fear, and the half-fainting Isabel bent down her pale face on her open hands—there it stopped; the feeble torch, held low and straight forward, made the face of the bearer more ghastly by being seen above its light.

The complexion was that of a corpse;

the bones were all but visible ; the long thin nose and pallid lips had no look of life ; but the eyes were of another character—large, black, and full of a spiritual, unearthly light, they seemed as if all of life had centred in them. The spirit was alive, though the body was all but dead. The apparition—for such the tremblers deemed it—showed no surprise at seeing the visitors ; the torch was raised higher so as to reveal the strangers more distinctly, and the effect of the light being cast down, instead of thrown up on her countenance, produced an agreeable change in its cadaverous aspect.

“ Welcome, my children : what are your wants ? ” she said, in a mild but hollow voice.

“ Who speaks to us ? ” demanded Hilda, doubtfully.

“ The Abbess of St. Bridget’s,” answered the voice.

“ Who died here ? ” said Hilda, faintly.

“ Who keeps her rule here still. Are ye travellers, children ? ”

The last words were spoken in a manner too natural to allow of doubt. It was the

abbess in real form still, though reduced to the likeness of a spectre.

Hilda knelt down ; and little Isabel's eyes fearfully peeped through the covering fingers ; while, with all the dignity of her former state, she gravely gave them her blessing.

"We sought but for rest, mother : we are bound for a distant journey."

"The rule of our order, daughter, is always observed ;" with a slight inclination she made answer,—“though these are troublous times ; troublous times”—she repeated, in a hurried manner, and with a wilder light in her large eyes,—“our community is not what it was : sister Agnes used to wait on strangers, and sister Martha,—but come, my children, I will myself serve you !”

Isabel hung back ; and Hilda falteringly expressed a reluctance to incommode a hostess who still inspired them both with awe.

Raising an arm that was truly spectral in its wasted aspect, and with a reproving glance at the speaker, the nun pointed to the inscription on the wall of the dormitory,

—"I was a stranger, and ye took me in ;" and in the tone of one accustomed to be obeyed, added only the words, "Follow me, my children."

Drawing by the hand the more trembling of the two, Hilda followed the uncertain light of the feeble torch, which the nun held high so as to throw a forward gleam on the darkness that now filled the passages, through which she preceded them with a gliding, hasty step, but one more indicative of mortal weakness than of supernatural movement.

She led them to what had been—still were—the apartments of the Abbess of St. Bridget's. A single stool, and on the floor a wooden trencher, a cup, and a pitcher of water, were all the requisites for hospitality that were to be seen.

"Our stores have not yet arrived," said the stately lady, waving her hand as if to say they saw all she had to offer. "To-morrow—to-morrow will be our festival. Ye have chanced ill, daughters, to come on the vigil of St. Bridget, when we are but preparing for her festival : nathless, our rule shall not be broken, and what we have shall be set before ye."

So saying, she drew from a corner two or three dried up and undressed roots, and, filling the cup with water from the pitcher, invited them to partake of St. Bridget's hospitality. A painful suspicion occurred to the mind of Hilda;—the poor woman, who thus dispensed the charity she had power to bestow, was herself suffering from famine.—Without consideration, she threw her pilgrim's wallet from her shoulder; and, hastily opening it, said,

“We have food, mother: condescend, I pray you, to partake of it with us.”

“We eat only in community,” the nun answered, with that gentle air of correction which causes one instantly to be sensible of an error.

“But you have fasted long, mother,” the girl pleaded, now recurring to her first belief that the intellects of the recluse were disordered. The large, almost glaring, eyes she looked at fastened for an instant on the provisions that appeared before them; the sight of bread caused them to dilate; but with a shudder the nun turned away her head.

“The longer the fast, the sooner the feast,”

she said ; while a smile, ghastly indeed, yet spreading a beautiful light over her death-like countenance, for a moment revealed the shining teeth, whose whiteness gave the sallow face, from which the flesh seemed to have dropped away, a more cadaverous aspect.

Having uttered this equivocal saying, the Abbess of St. Bridget's showed them a heap of rushes, on which they were to repose, and retired to her own cell.

Too weary to eat, and too frightened to believe herself able to sleep, Isabel sat down on the rushes, drawing Hilda beside her. Soothing the trembler with assurances that the poor nun was the object of pity rather than of fear, Hilda prevailed on her to recline, without undressing, on the couch ; but not until she had placed herself beside her, when, clasping her arms around her, and clinging to her like a timid child, the little girl soon yielded to the effects of fatigue, and fell asleep.

Hilda could not do so ; many thoughts kept her awake. The mysterious nun she saw was no phantom ; but how, as a real

living creature, she had been supported in her strange state of isolation, she could not think, since, that it was not by miracle, her wasted form too plainly declared.—Twice, when the drowsiness of fatigue was stealing over her senses, she was again aroused by the quavering, weak, and grating voice that had once blended in full choir, breaking the deathlike stillness of the deserted convent by the feeble chant of the now disused offices.

At length a deeper slumber stole over her. With arms fast clasped round each other, both the young pilgrims slept profoundly. They were awoke at the dawn of light by the opening of the door : both started up : the spectral nun stood in the doorway, appearing more spectral in the gray dim light. She waved her hand, and seemed to attempt speech, which was beyond her powers : a faint gurgling sound was all they heard. They obeyed the motion of her arm, and, hastily rising, followed her unsteady progress down the passage. It was the same they had entered the preceding evening, and at the extreme end of

which they had first seen the apparition that had so appalled them. As they followed her now, under the belief that she was conducting them to the portal from whence they were to be dismissed on their journey, they saw her movements were even more ghost-like than the night before. She glided on, as if impelled by a volition that did not depend on animal powers for its accomplishment. Sometimes a reeling movement would take her out of the direct line, which was quickly recovered; at others an involuntary pause was succeeded by a progress that nearly resembled flying. Thus was the extremely long passage traversed in a way that sometimes obliged her young followers to change their quick walk to a short run, in order to keep up with her.

At the end of the passage she stopped; raised upwards a sliding door that, when down, formed part of the wall, and entered within it.

The next moment they stood in the chapel of St. Bridget. It was small, but the altar was in a blaze of light, though daylight was excluded by the blocking up of the

windows as well as of the external door. With some astonishment they saw a richly decked altar, whereupon gold cups and a richly jewelled chalice, together with ornaments of costly price, glittered in the artificial light.

The nun went on rapidly to her place near it : the girls, with a feeling of awe that impressed them both with a sense of something strange being about to happen, stopped at a short distance. A priest, attired in the richest robes, was at the altar when they looked up from their kneeling posture.

Mass went on ; the voice of the abbess was heard in the responses, at times loud, at others harsh, guttural, and lost in a vain effort. She had communicated, but still knelt in the same spot. As Hilda watched her, she saw her sink lower and lower, until she lay where she had knelt. She was soon beside her, and even Isabel hastened to assist. They lifted her between them ; —she was not a heavy load—and the priest hastened to divest himself of his robes in order to join them.

They carried her to the apartments they had left, laid her on their rushy couch, and knelt beside it, believing her to be dead. While the awe, the horror, with which the sight of death fills the hearts of the young who are unused to its aspect, kept them silent there, she opened her immensely large, but now dim eyes, and, glancing them around, said the words—"Not here!"—raising her hand in another direction. The priest came in at the moment, and interpreted her meaning by saying she wished to be taken to her own cell. They carried her there. A faint smile was shed over her face when laid down in the familiar place. To get a cordial was Hilda's desire ; but the priest, shaking his head, prepared to administer the last rite.

When they stood beside her again, the glassy eyes were fixed ; the white teeth were painfully visible, while with considerable effort she said the words, "Summon the community!"

Her behest she supposed to be obeyed, for the next minute, as if addressing the community then scattered to the four quar-

ters of the earth's compass, she uttered her last injunction, "Observe your rule."

There was a sudden pause, the word "Jesu" came faintly gurgling to the pallid lip, and the ejected Abbess of Saint Bridget's was dead.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE priest who had unexpectedly appeared among them was able to explain to Hilda and Isabel the reality of the case that had given rise to the supernatural story they had heard of this deserted convent.

The abbess, only now deceased, had been dedicated by her mother in infancy, in fact before her birth into this world, to the service of St. Bridget. She had entered that community while still a mere child, and found in its rule of charity the only species of happiness she could understand. She rose to be its head, and had long held her sway as Abbess of St. Bridget's, when rumours of its sequestration became rife.

At that time she made a vow never to abandon the rule she had long before vowed

to observe ; and to this repeated vow she added another—perhaps more rash—never to leave the house in which she had been dedicated, and which she ruled.

When the act of confiscation was perpetrated, the abbess secreted the treasures of Saint Bridget's chapel ; and entered into a compact with its chaplain which he could not refuse to maintain. It was, that he should come at stated times to perform certain offices at that altar. At some risk he had kept his compact, and at these times had brought to her a bag of provisions, which, with roots from the neglected garden, was all the means of sustenance she had had. She had returned to the convent when it was divested of all save the treasures she had safely hidden ; and there she had lived ever since : the recent compulsory absence of the priest had caused her to be left for a longer period than usual without any supply, however scanty, of provisions. That her intellect had latterly become disordered, there was no doubt ; and that her death was finally owing to want of nourishment, there was abundant proof.

Thus did the two young wanderers find themselves now occupying the uncongenial post of watchers of the dead. The body, laid out in its conventual robe, was carried back to the chapel and placed before the altar. The lamp, which the zeal of the priest had continued to supply, was kept burning there. There was no one to perform the last offices for the dead save these young strangers, except the priest, who, having maintained the secret of her existence in her old habitation, was anxious that it should be still preserved. He undertook to prepare the grave in the spot where he had laid some of the sisters to rest, and that evening they agreed to inter the body of the last Abbess of St. Bridget's.

Having said the customary prayers, the old man went to his task with a heavy heart; for the sister who had passed away at last from the place from whence earthly power had failed to uproot her, had been the last link that connected him to the past of his life. His occupation was gone: the proscribed service she had engaged him, at no little risk, to continue to perform at

the deserted convent, could no longer be maintained. He was left alone: for, of the brethren of his acquaintance, some had been reformed, some had obeyed the Queen's mandate, and, by conforming, had remained in possession of their livings; others had gone beyond the seas, and taken religious service in foreign lands. A few like himself lived as they could among the poor people on the hills, or were lodged for charity and in disguise in the dwellings of the higher classes, who were subjected to even capital penalty for harbouring them.

In this state of things, when he buried the last Abbess of St. Bridget's, he buried, too, the last link that had held him to the profession to which his life had been devoted. The lamp that had ever burned before the altar he served, must now be extinguished. It was marvellous how the old man's tears fell heavily down as he raised the sod that was to cover the dead.

And younger cheeks were wet, for Hilda and Isabel wept for him still more than for her whose wish and prayer had been

so well accorded ; who rested where she had prayed to lie,—still, as she believed, observing her rule of charity, and ministering to the strangers, who, on the contrary, seemed to have been sent to minister to her in the last labour of love that poor humanity craves for.

Leaving Isabel, whose lighter mind sought relief in employment, to assist the old man in stripping the altar, removing the sacrament and sacred vessels, with all the other treasures which the piety of St. Bridget's late votary had so securely concealed, Hilda, after the painful and touching ceremony of interment was over, repaired to the spot we before described, to which the curious Round Tower and beautiful stone Cross still lend their interest ; and, sitting on the base of the latter, mused long and deeply on the singular event that had passed. Trouble and suffering appeared to surround her on every side, and from musing on general or national calamities, she naturally returned to those of which her own family and she herself seemed to be the peculiar subjects.

Thus meditating, bent forward with an elbow resting on her knee, she did not attend to a sound coming along the road at the other side of the deep rivulet that ran almost at her feet. It was that of a horse's feet, walking slowly. On its stopping, she raised her eyes without lifting her declined head, and thus saw, only partly, a horse and dismounted horseman standing opposite to her. Her thoughts had just then been resting on Symonds with that sort of intuitive abhorrence which good and true minds feel for the base, however artfully that baseness may be veiled. She had dreaded his pursuit, fearing that he doubted the purpose of her journey. Nervously excited as she had been, her fears readily took alarm. She sprung upon the pedestal on which she sat, and twined one arm tightly round the cross, while the other she waved with an indignant movement to the man who stood separated from her by the stream, but intently regarding her. As she did so, the altitude she had gained caused her plainly to see a velvet cloak over a steel breastplate,

and a long plume partly shading a face very unlike that of the treacherous Symonds. It was the open countenance of Guy D'Esterre!

With an irrepressible cry, Hilda leaped from her elevated post, and fled away with the speed of terror. Darting into the chapel, the door of which was ajar, with outstretched hands she exclaimed—

“We are discovered—you are taken—fly, fly for your life.”

The trembling hands of the old priest dropped on the floor the golden chalice he was carrying away. Isabel, starting from an employment the novelty of which had amused her, stood with her arms filled by the vestments he had laid in them, her distended eyes fixed in horror on the pale, excited face of the hasty intruder. The old man's first thought was for a deposit more sacred than the golden vessels, and, reverently securing it, he gave it into Hilda's hands, saying only—“Quick! to the vault beneath.”

“To the vault!” cried Isabel, “let us all to the vault!” and, rushing forward, she

seized the old priest, and pulled him to the spot wherein they had been secreting the convent riches.

Hilda, usually so calm and self-possessed, had, on this occasion, lost these attributes. The little trembling Isabel was more capable of thought and action.

“Shut first that sliding door,” cried the priest, as the girl forced him away, “they may not then find the entrance here. It is blocked up from without.”

She closed it, and descended into the vault, down the steps of which Isabel had already flung the load she had carried. There was nothing but what they took with them to be concealed; and the three fugitives stood clinging to each other in almost utter darkness in the small vault, or rather cell, which the nuns had constructed for the concealment of the convent treasures in times of danger.

Actual danger was more easily borne by the impatient Isabel than suspense; and as time went on without any disturbance to their solitude and silence—

“Hilda, what saw you out there?” she

demanded. "How many were they?—were they men at arms?"

"Hush! I saw *him*," was the whispered reply.

"Him? whom, then, was he?"

The question alone operated a change in the excited feelings of the lady it was put to. One solitary horseman, unattended by a single follower, was all who had caused this panic!

"Blessed St. Bridget defend us!" murmured the old priest. "May it not be, daughter, that your fears magnified the danger?"

"I feared but for you, father," she answered; endeavouring to account for her trepidation to herself, rather than to him. "Had you been seen engaged in acts they have made unlawful——"

Her words were stopped by loud voices without; and heavy steps were heard in a part of the building above them.

"Heaven be thanked that we removed all traces of recent habitation!" said Hilda, who now felt more real cause for fear than she had before.

"They are actually searching the house!"

—A deep sigh closed her speech. “Such are now the worthy feats of British knight-hood!” was her unexpressed thought.

A laugh, so very joyous that two of the trembling party, even in such a dolorous state, could scarcely forbear to join in it, rung over their heads, sounding through the empty and vaulted room above them. Isabel had started at its sound, but, ere it ended, her grasp on Hilda’s arm relaxed.

“Morven, Morven!” she cried, with a voice so wild and thrilling that if the person who had been overhead had not moved off even while laughing, he might have heard the cry.

“Let me go, Hilda! it is he!”

“Foolish child! be still,” she whispered.
“What madness seizes you?”

But the impetuous girl broke from her hold, dashed up the few stone steps of the vault, and rushed into the chapel. Hilda sprang after her, and managed to intercept her passage to the private door. But, like a wild, frightened little animal, she no sooner saw her way cut off, than she turned without stopping in her race, and flew up the

belfry stairs at the opposite extremity of the chapel. There Hilda pursued, hoping at least to prevent her from discovering herself to the man whom she supposed she fancied to be Morven. Nimble and wild as she was, they reached the tower almost at the same moment, and, to Hilda's relief, saw only the backs of two horsemen turning over the small bridge which would bring them out on the road that was separated from the convent by the river.

Isabel at once perceived her error : they both wore the English dress, and both belonged to the service of the Queen.

"It is not Morven," she sighed ; "and yet how like it was to his laugh !"

"Silly girl ! how near you were to betraying—to ruining us all !"

But Isabel did not think of that. Her hope, her fancy disappointed, she sat down on the stone stair and wept. Hilda looked from the turret to see the horsemen take the opposite direction from that leading to the metropolis ; and, congratulating herself on the fact that there would not now be any risk of encountering Sir Guy again on their

road, she twined her arm round the impulsive and now doubly dejected little lady, and guided her back more slowly to the darksome vault where the poor priest remained in a state of woeful anxiety. To escape from their dungeon was the desire of all the party ; but the fears of the old man suggested the probability of some guard having been left in the house by the officers who had so quickly departed. It was a possibility ; and, however impatient the young girls were to get away, they dared not adventure his detection, especially in the place where he had just concealed the long-hidden treasures.

In this dilemma the lively wit of the little Isabel suggested a plan which even the priest seconded as an excellent device : it was, that Hilda should array herself in the white robe of the deceased nun, one of which lay among other things in the vault, and thus personify the ghost which was believed to haunt the deserted house. By this means she would be certain to make all their enemies fly before her, and could return in safety to give them a report of the state of things above ground.

“Nay,” said Hilda, after a moment’s thought, “if I go to reconnoitre, it shall be in my own proper person. No one will dare to do me hurt.”

“But I ought to go with you?” said Isabel, inquiringly.

“Nay, that must not be,” she was answered; “Morven assuredly is not there, and the good father must not be again left alone.”

With a little fearfulness she made her first step through the chapel door; trembling and starting at the sound of her own footsteps, she proceeded on, and, nerving herself for the worst, she gathered resolution as she advanced. But profound stillness was everywhere; and she soon became convinced that, whatever danger had passed over, none remained to threaten them.

Her mission safely accomplished, she returned to conduct those she had left from their underground station. They ascended gladly to upper air,—not to daylight, for the shades of twilight had gathered so deeply, that, but for the mingling light of a rising moon, they could not have seen their way

through the gloomy and saddening building they now left to decay.

It was resolved that no attempt should be made to carry away the treasures at this time. A journey of a few hours would bring them to a house, on the fidelity of whose inmates they could rely. There Hilda and Isabel were to meet the horses promised by the foster-brother of the former; and there also the old man, who accompanied them, could obtain the assistance that was necessary for the removal of the treasures of St. Bridget's altar.

Leaving them to pursue a journey, the purpose of which would have been at an end had they only encountered the invaders who so alarmed them in the deserted convent, we shall now render an account of Sir Guy's apparition there.

CHAPTER XX.

IN the gloom of a wintry afternoon the aspect of the person who entered the door of his prison chamber might be indistinct to D'Esterre ; but whether it were so or not, he uttered the words of greeting—

“Welcome hither again, Anster, though we have but sorry cheer to entertain you withal.”

“Your guest but mocks your expectation, Sir Guy,” said a voice whose accents made his heart to bound ; “I fear I come only to bear you tidings of Major Anster’s departure hence. He has ere this returned to his duty in Ireland.”

The speaker advanced towards the light as he spoke : his noble person was more set off than concealed by the mantle that

enveloped it. The large plume of his hat shaded one side of his face; and turning, so as to keep that side to the young man who was a stranger to him, he presented the other to D'Esterre, with a glance from his kindling eye that, while it told him the visitor must not be recognised by him, made amends for an apparently cold greeting from an early friend. After a few commonplace inquiries, the visitor turned to Morven, and said—

“And this fair youth—pity that one so young and brave should be cooped up in this vile cell!—and on what charge, I pray you?”

“That of being my father's son,” said Morven, before his companion could give another answer.

“In sooth a grave offence,” cried the stranger, laughing, “and one worthy of her Grace's displeasure. Sorry am I that it is one that exceeds the bounds of my poor ability to plead against. In another case my service might have somewhat availed.”

“Fear not, most worthy stranger,” returned the youth, “that your service may

rest for lack of offences on the part of a prisoner to claim them. See you now another of mine—I am Irish !”

“ We must find thee a surety for that crime,” was the answer.

“ I am, moreover, guilty of being my father’s heir.”

“ Ha ! and his lands are broad, mayhap, and his followers strong ?”

“ Indifferently so, even still.”

“ Are those followers true ?”

“ To whom ?” asked Morven, opening his eyes.

“ To the Queen ?”

“ That depends on her servitors.”

“ Ha !” ejaculated the stranger again, and mused on the answer.

“ Their lord could bend them to or from her service, methinks ?”

“ He could easily do so.”

“ Is such the case with all the Irish chiefs ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Are they readily gained by kindness ?”

“ Even when the bait is scantily hidden.”

"Is your father united with the other factious chiefs?"

"I know not what the phrase may mean."

"Is he united with the rebels?"

"Rebels?—I know of none."

"Tyrone and O'Donnell—all the North is up under those leaders."

"My father will not take arms," said Morven, coldly.

"Has he influence with other chiefs?"

"With some of them he has connexions."

The stranger turned to D'Esterre, and, in a lower voice, inquired if this were the youth whom he had been told Perrot had taken as hostage for his father's fidelity. On being answered affirmatively, he turned again to the other, and demanded his name.

"Morven O'Connor of Fitzclare."

"A brave-sounding title, in truth," he observed, "and one that would doubtless call up many stout hands to defend it. Fair sir, it may be my lot to do you a service yet, and yours to return it."

The stranger rose as he spoke the words, and, as if accidentally, drew so close to D'Esterre as to place a hand on his shoulder, whispering the word—"Cadiz," as he passed. But, turning again ere he withdrew, he said—

"Farewell, my masters ; I give you good e'en, and trust it may not be our lot to meet here again. It may be, fair sir," he added, looking to Morven, "that some chance might put it in my way to serve you ; if so, say how it shall be done?"

"An O'Connor may not ask a favour from the stranger's hands," replied the youth.

"Oh! ho!" muttered the visitor. "But can an O'Connor be grateful for services that are rendered unasked?"

"The gratitude that is uncalled-for is ever the most ready," said Morven, gravely.

The stranger bowed proudly, if not haughtily, and the door opening to his signal, he passed through it in silence.

On the following morning the keeper entered their apartment, bringing to them the tidings that an order for their removal had arrived.

"Are we, then, free?" asked D'Esterre.

"The orders," he was answered, "were, that the prisoners should depart under the guidance of the person who waited for them."

"Now, a fair good night to the regions of Tartarus," said Guy, as they emerged from the gloomy portal; "but whither are we to go?"

"Whither?" cried Morven, as the evening breeze, heavy as it was, blew out the long locks of his hair. "Give me but liberty under the sky of heaven, and I ask no other lodging."

"His mantle," muttered the man behind them, in an inaudible voice, "will serve an Irish thief, they say, for a lodging at all times."

"It is her Highness's pleasure to spare you the trouble of seeking one as yet," said a more courtly voice, as a figure emerged from the shade; "ye must with me, fair sirs."

"To the Tower!" Morven ejaculated.

"Nay, nay; I have no fear of that. Come on."

And, taking his arm, D'Esterre proceeded with their guide, watching the way he was taking, and becoming more satisfied that he was leading them in the direction he desired, until they stopped at the entrance of a mansion he well knew. It was that of the Earl of Essex.

The flambeaux of many attendants dazzled the eyes accustomed to prison gloom ; but their conductors received fresh orders from the gentleman in waiting ; and they followed him through the splendid apartments to a remote one, where, beside a table strewn with papers, letters, and despatches, a sickly, infirm figure lay reclined on a couch. The form, decrepid from disease, was contrasted with a countenance of singular activity ; an eye beaming with sagacity and acute penetration, the quick inquisitive glance of which, added to the considering and crafty expression of the face, was the very type of the keen politician and diplomatist.

That eye, having once surveyed the strangers, was again occupied with the papers on the table.

“Be seated, sirs,” he said, “and excuse the infirmities of health.”

This was Anthony Bacon, whose genius supplied his munificent patron with the means of affording Queen Elizabeth secret intelligence from foreign courts. As he now sat, preparing some matter of importance for transmission to the Earl of Essex, at the palace, another visitor entered the chamber, and, standing close behind D’Esterre, said gaily—

“The Muses befriend me ! and show me the way to fortune by any less brain-breaking matter than that.”

“Every man hath his vocation, Master Harrington,” he answered, “and mine is to me more easy than yours would be. Your service seems to me hard enough : you must watch and wait, kneel and pray, worship and rant, suit your humour to every caprice, and cut your jerkin to every fashion.”

“Aye, for the nonce ; if five-and-twenty manors hang thereby,” the other answered. “Sweet Petrarch be my aid ! for even now am I racking my brain for a sonnet

wherewith to take my gentle godmother's fantasy."

"And think you a sonnet will win your northern lands?"

"If it fall short, I must e'en eke it out with some fair offering: a jewel, or new gaud, or quaint device which may move her Highness to make shorter work of it than those tough-hearted thieves, the crown lawyers."

"Let not your wit outrun your wisdom, good Master Harrington. Were it not well your errand were sped?"

"Rightly said," returned Harrington; "so, if it please your guests to grace my departure, I will away; the evening wears apace, Sir Guy, and ere long the dull-footed night will be treading on our heels."

They had gone some distance on their way before D'Esterre cared to inquire their destination. He was answered by an exclamation of surprise.

"What! know you not, forsooth, that we are bound for Hampton Court."

"Not to enter the presence, surely?" the other replied, glancing, in dismay, over his careless attire.

“Certes, ye are not like to speed well in your matters since your persons have been so little cared for : why, our friend of the Irishry there might suit the humour of the antiquated Hall, who would have us attired, mayhap, like the son of the patriarch, in raiment of divers colours. Know you his rhymes, Sir Guy ?”

Fancying he talked only for talking sake, Guy replied that he had deeper matter than rhymes or rhymesters to reflect upon.

“The Hibernians are all bards and romancers, I am told,” Harrington continued. “Barbarous ones, though; they skill not of sweet harmonies nor gentle devices. But here, good sir, my mission ends : yonder is one of the Gentlemen Pensioners, who has orders to conduct you further.”

And, as if glad to be rid of a commission that might bring him more trouble than it gave him pleasure, he spoke a few words to the Pensioner, who, like all those men selected by the Maiden Queen to that service, was one of lofty stature and handsome countenance, by whom D'Esterre

and Morven were forthwith conducted to an antechamber, the other entrance door of which, being open, gave them a full view of that wherein the Queen was.

It chanced that a foreign ambassador had been received, for whom Elizabeth and her Court had arrayed themselves in all that splendour of attire which caused the scene to burst like a dazzling vision on eyes so unused as Morven's to such a display.

The lovely ladies, whose personal charms so far eclipsed those of their imperious mistress, were careful not to vie with her either in the depth of their ruffs or the richness of their robes ; but to the utmost limits that their fears permitted, the rage for finery, in which she took the lead, was followed by them.

In a white robe powdered with gold, and covered even on her back with jewels formed into the rarest devices, and with a jewelled fan of feathers in her hand, Elizabeth sat withdrawn from the anxious groups who watched her looks and movements, in earnest discourse with one whose aspect

still more riveted the attention of the two young men.—It was a figure to cast that of the old, extravagantly dressed Queen into the shade.

Essex, attired in all the splendour which the gorgeous fashion of the time permitted, rested a hand on the chair-back of his vain and doting mistress. He bent his noble head low, as he uttered some of the false speeches which—though only—to such a strain of passionate adoration was the ear they were addressed to accustomed—were becoming disgustful to himself, and his cheek well nigh touched the dry one to which he inclined. Elizabeth tapped that cheek with her feather fan. It was the playful touch with which she was in the habit of noticing the good looks of some expectant who relied upon a handsome figure for an introduction to royal favour. Yet the touch, playful though it was, called up a deep suffusion over a face that had lately more darkly reddened beneath the indignity of a blow from the same fair hand.

The recollection of that moment still

caused the frame of the impetuous Earl to quiver with the tingling of the hot, proud blood that had at the former moment mounted even to frenzy, and led to a scene that, though the quarrels of lovers be, it is said, but the renewal of love (a maxim too often found untrue), it is probable could never be wholly forgiven, as it was not likely to be forgotten, by an insulted Queen.

D'Esterre gazed earnestly and sadly on the noble form of the man he had loved in youth ; of him who had been both his comrade in arms, and his leader in some gallant actions. His best years were lost in a state of virtual captivity in a Court to which the inconceivable passion of a tyrannic mistress, considerably older than his mother might be, so absolutely confined him, that his escape to join her own army was effected in secrecy, with danger, and followed by an immediate recall to the service that he loathed, yet could not leave. Yet at length the fierce fever of ambition, the undermining process of dissipation and extravagance, rendered to him a necessity what had once been impatiently submitted to as an indignity ; and he feared

to leave to his adversaries the Court with which his hopes had become identified. To feign a passion which his soul despised, to affect a humility that his towering nature scorned,—this was enough to irritate a temper milder than his ; while the lavish fondness at one moment, and jealous fury at another, of his lion-hearted Queen, had so utterly spoiled that rash and impetuous temper as to occasion quarrels between them, the repetition of which had wearied her, and too often removed from his mind and manner even the semblance of respect for her.

Noble he still was, and noble he looked, as, splendidly attired and sparkling with jewels, he seemed more fit to be the ruler than the ruled. But the eye of the friend who had known him in better and purer times saw the change which the false sycophants, the anxious politicians, or pleasure-seeking groups, that filled the glittering hall, were all unconscious of.

A feeling of bitterness against the stately but thin and careworn lady, over whose royal person he leaned, was insensibly blending with Sir Guy's reflections. How might

she, even from her high seat, have fostered what was noble, have repressed what tended to ill, in a heart so full of promise, so generous and impulsive, as that of the youth who entered her service so young, when his pulse beat true to honour, and his soul was unscathed by the falsity to which her strange, inconceivable passion had so long consigned him !

Did she love ? or was it that the coquette of sixty-five really believed the man who was only verging on what is termed the prime of life, loved her with the fulsome love she obliged him, as well as all her other favourites, to profess ?

Thus ruminating, he had forgotten his companion, whom he, at length, perceived to be entirely absorbed in contemplating a scene so unusual to his eyes.

The aspect of Hampton Court was at that, its then modern period, very unlike that of the Royal Almshouse of the present time. Left more as the great Wolsey had designed, and his magnificent robber had completed it, it bore to the youthful eye, that had only been for late years accustomed to the rude or impoverished scenes entailed by war and

rapacity on his desolated country, an air of almost magical brilliancy. The walls, resplendent with gold or tapestries, seemed but a rich setting to the fair forms sparkling in silver, gold, and jewels of divers hues, and to the manly ones not less magnificently arrayed, which they enclosed.

The excitable and easily swayed mind of the younger man was engrossed with the glittering panorama ; while that of the elder was bent on serious and even saddening thought.

All at once, emerging from the circlet of foes that keenly watched, and faithful, almost desponding friends, who as anxiously followed each change in his undiplomatic countenance, came forth that brilliant star, which, as some fanciful one among the latter had said, paled not its radiancy, though it moved nearest and next to the sun.

Essex advanced from the chair of Elizabeth to greet the released prisoners.

As he approached them, saying in a lowered voice—"Will ye trust a prison visitor again, my friends?"—Morven started, and, open-

ing his large eyes, stared at the speaker in some bewilderment. He, the nearest to the throne, the most intimate with her he had learned to hate, was it to him—noble and brilliant as he was—he owed his freedom, or perhaps his life? The visitor of the Marshalsea was, indeed, scarcely recognisable in the splendid figure, glittering with jewels of price, that now appeared to them; the face, then somewhat clouded by anxiety or care, was now elate in hope and pride, beaming in generosity,—daring, rather than shunning, the scrutiny of all men.

Essex—who had captivated his capricious Queen as much by a saucy contempt of the arts by which her fawning courtiers ministered to her love both of finery and flattery, and by his careless defiance of the aids of dress in setting off his handsome person, as by the rashness, pride, and impetuosity of temper, which might render him as interesting to her as some spoiled boys are to a doting parent—had before this time found the necessity of fashioning himself rather more to her taste, and of vying with his numerous enemies of the

Court in display, and in that brilliancy of attire, which, at the Court of the Maiden Queen, perhaps surpassed all that had been formerly known in England, or was known in the rest of Europe.

Guy D'Esterre bowed low and silently; but the eyes of the young men met, and a smile and a cordial salutation followed. They had been comrades in arms, and friends in youth, and, different as their path and their lives had been in other respects, there were links of sympathy not yet dissevered. They spoke a few minutes together in a low voice; and the Earl, apprehensive that the reckless Irishman would commit some misdemeanour, or utter some wild speech before the Queen, drew him aside, and was giving him some hints for his behaviour with considerable earnestness, when, the attention of the ever-watchful Elizabeth being drawn to the absence of Essex, she demanded its cause. A lady of the Court, with pale face and dark eyes, that incessantly followed the movements and watched the changeful countenance of the already

doomed Earl, made answer, and said, in the calm measured tone that had become peculiar to her, looking on to the waiting-room as she spoke,—

“Your Highness may see that the good Earl hath doubtless matter of interest whereon to confer with the young rebel to whom he speaks!”

The quick, imperious eyes of the suspicious Queen followed the slow, almost death-dealing gaze of those black orbs, and she beheld the apparently secret intercourse that was passing in the ante-room with the irritation which she now almost constantly felt against her spoiled favourite.

“Why tarry these knaves in the waiting-room?” she said, in a voice the tone of which reached the ear of Essex, and caused him to hasten back, before she added—

“My Lord of Buckhurst, command them to our presence, for the Earl makes us wait his leisure.”

Essex regained his place. In the first presumption of his generous, trustful youth, he had scorned to address his vain old

sovereign in the adulatory language which all persons used to her, and which many carried to an extreme that a Pope might reject as being only suited to Divinity, and not to its vicegerent. The fire of her eye, perhaps, was not lost on him as he approached her, for with a humility that at once subdued it, he said—

“Madam, the objects of your gracious favour, being now freed from the icy chain of bondage, crave to be cheered by the beams of your blessed countenance !”

Elizabeth looked on him : D'Esterre, who was advancing towards her, beheld that look, and it checked his step, as a sudden foreboding shot to his heart. It was a strange look : there was in it affection smothered, alienated, perhaps, but yet not dead ; but there was in it something more and graver than this. We know what it is to meet the gaze of one who is aware of circumstances of peril or of trial impending over us, which we are rashly and ignorantly hurrying on to meet :—such was the look of Elizabeth at Essex,

blent with the repressed working of the passionate affection which, outraged though it had often been, still lingered in a heart that had known so many loves, and which now found relief from some heavy thought in a long-drawn but inaudible sigh.

Elizabeth rose, and, silently taking the arm of Lady Scroop, the faithful friend of Essex, motioned to him to attend her, and proceeded to an inner apartment, or, as in modern days it would be called, boudoir, which, though its floor was covered with rushes, was lavishly ornamented.

D'Esterre, while he stopped, overheard a pert young courtier, of the Cecil faction, whisper to another, that "Essex would wear his night-gown to-morrow."

"Nay," was the answer, "the time for that trick is over; his next sickness will have no nursing from his mistress."

"Then the night-gown may go on for good and all," said the other.

"Amen!" was the grave reply.

Unable to vent his indignation otherwise than by a disdainful glance, he anxiously awaited the reappearance of the Earl. Just

opposite to him, he observed the lady of the pale face and dark eyes: the latter were directed to the door of the royal cabinet, and remained so till, with a bearing that seemed to hurl the gauntlet to all his foes, Essex appeared at it, and summoned Sir Guy and Morven to the presence of the Queen.

The English knight advanced, and bowed knee and head before her; but the Irish youth remained standing beside the door.

Glancing at D'Esterre, and then turning to their conductor, Elizabeth said—

“Is this he of whom you told us,—the knight who served against our enemy of Spain?”

“The same, madam, who saved the banner of Essex at Cadiz, and gained honour in the Low Countries.”

“A proper youth, in truth,” she observed, “were his apparel of a better fashion. Certes, my Lord of Essex, you should have seen to that before bringing him to our Court!”

“An please your Grace,” said the Earl, “prison gear is but sorry attire, and our

gallant Sir Guy has had no leisure to change it."

"Fie on you, Devereux, to bring such vileness into our presence!—Mayhap, there was infection, too!" And, with a gesture of horror, Elizabeth, who, brave and spirited as she was, had a singularly nervous fear of disease, drew some paces away, motioning Guy to arise and begone.

Essex speedily assured her of safety, declaring that he had well informed himself on that point before he allowed his friends to come into her presence.

"Rise then, Sir Guy; you have got over your late matter well, but mind our words, and meddle no more with those rogues of Ireland, if you would not have some more of that prison soil on your jerkin which our friend of Essex is so fain to excuse."

While this was saying, the Earl had been speaking in an under voice with Morven O'Connor, with whom he apprehended some unfortunate difficulty. The result of his rather anxious words surpassed his hope; for when the Queen

somewhat impatiently demanded—"Where may be your other protégé, my Lord—he of the Irishry?" Morven, stepping from the screen which the person of the Earl interposed, suddenly placed his knee on the ground, and answered—

"He is where he never thought to find himself—at the feet of Elizabeth of England!"

There was a sort of wild grace, of untaught, careless elegance in the figure and attitude of the youth before her, that caught the fancy so quickly captivated by externals. The devotion with which Essex had already inspired him beamed in the dark eyes that Morven raised to her face, and Elizabeth easily transferred the devotion and admiration they expressed to herself.

His speech, which Morven was far from intending to be insincere, but simply meant as a confession of his own surprise at finding himself kneeling to a Queen he had learned to hate rather than love, was naturally as much misunderstood as his impassioned looks. At sixty-five,

if the Vestal of England had learned to doubt that she was still the object of passionate love, she still listened to the declaration of such love from all who sought for power or favour.

She smiled graciously on the upturned eyes that gazed on her stately but withered person with emotions very different from those she supposed, and replied—

“Elizabeth of England, and of Ireland too, fair sir, hath been not a little belied, methinks, to those of that land who know her no more than you but lately did. Could all of your country see us thus, I trow we should not need even our faithful Essex to win our rebels to our service!”

“In my country, gracious lady,” answered Morven, “they know of you only by the deeds of your servants!”

“And we have said ere this that we had set wolves to guard the sheep,” she responded, with a clouded brow, “therefore to say they know of us but by them may be scant praise.”

“Prithee, good Devereux,” the Queen added, turning to the Earl, who stood by

her in no little apprehension of the turn the colloquy might take—"Tell us how we should style this fellow?—the nomenclature of the Irishry is somewhat beyond our knowledge."

"I am called Morven O'Connor of Fitzclare," he replied carelessly, answering for himself.

"A goodly sounding title, in sooth. Rise, then, Master Morven; and as we receive you to our favour, so we bind you to our allegiance!"

The young man raised the flashing eyes he had dropped; and, again gazing excitedly on the Queen, murmured in a deep tone—

"I rise not till the petition I kneel for be granted!"

In exceeding alarm, but with an outward air of pleasantry, Essex hastily approached the royal ear, and said, in a lowered voice, but one audible to the suppliant—

"The knave presumes already; the sun shines on him too strongly. He means to sue for a kiss of that sweet hand, by which his allegiance would be sealed for ever."

While speaking thus at her side, his eyes, full of warning, were bent on Morven.

“Ha!” said Elizabeth, with a smile, “stands it so, young gallant? Hast thou learned to be a suitor, and so new to Court? Tell us, then, the boon so devoutly sought for!”

“Justice for my country!” was the answer.

The erect, stiff figure before him was moved by a slight start at one so unexpected: that fearful oath, so familiar to her lips, and only too often repeated by her historians, broke out in impatient accents, as, turning to Essex, she said—

“——, this youth measures our liberality by his knowledge of our character, which, it seemeth us, is scant enough, seeing he sues only for that which it is our wont to give unsought. Justice for his country, forsooth! Ha! good lad, hath not our trusty Essex brought thee hither to tell us the tale he hath himself told us full oft? Our deputies are ambitious: our servants corrupt. Thou wouldst have the justice we have withheld.—Thy boon is granted—see, we give it thee, in

the person of our gallant Earl of Essex, our friend and thine. We give thee a ruler without ambition, and devoid of avarice, who shall have all power to administer the justice ye crave. There is our Deputy for Ireland!"

Her finger pointed to Essex, who started and grew pale at the unexpected speech. His proud, ambitious temper had led him to desire the dangerous pre-eminence which the government of Ireland would afford him; the machinations of his enemies won the Queen to consent to his removal from a Court from which, in the earlier years of her fondness, she could not spare him for a day. This consent was a proof that the doting fondness of the aged lady had turned into that irritable, fretted, jealous feeling, which is a torment of the bosom in which it dwells, and to the being who is its object.

Something like a conviction of this truth fell on the heart of Essex, as she thus announced his appointment to a post he had at first desired, and now dreaded. It was as if the first faint stroke of a funeral knell struck on his ear, as he heard the concluding words of his once loving mistress.

Elizabeth looked at him : the expression of his face and sudden pallor seemed to touch her ; she advanced towards him, but ere she reached his side, she was interrupted. Other eyes had been intently fixed on that face, they were the dark ones of that pale lady which seemed ever to follow his movements : this lady approached the Queen, and addressed her in a low voice.

“To the dance, then ; to the dance, my masters,” said Elizabeth, turning round in her progress towards the Earl ; “and you, good lad,” she added to Morven, “get you hence, and change your jerkin ; we make thee over to our trusty and well-beloved Lord of Essex, who will henceforth be surety for thy loyalty, and for our justice.”

If, however, the purpose of the dark-eyed dame were to prevent any further communication between her royal mistress and her favourite, it was, on this occasion, frustrated ; for, after a short observation of the dance, in which he did not join, Sir Guy, without intention, drew near to a door, the tapestry covering of which being, as if by accident, drawn to one side, allowed him, as well as

any other person who chose to stand near to it, to see and hear what was passing within the richly decorated cabinet from whence he had lately been dismissed.

Essex was still there, and was kneeling at the Queen's feet : both her hands were held in his, and covered with passionate kisses. His emotion at that moment was not probably simulated.

Elizabeth bent her tall figure till the towering head-gear overshadowed his ardent face.

"Devereux,—rash, impetuous boy !" she murmured ; but her utterance appeared to be impeded. "Blame not Elizabeth," she continued, after a pause, "if she one day have to lament over thee as vainly as Christ lamented over the children of Jerusalem !"

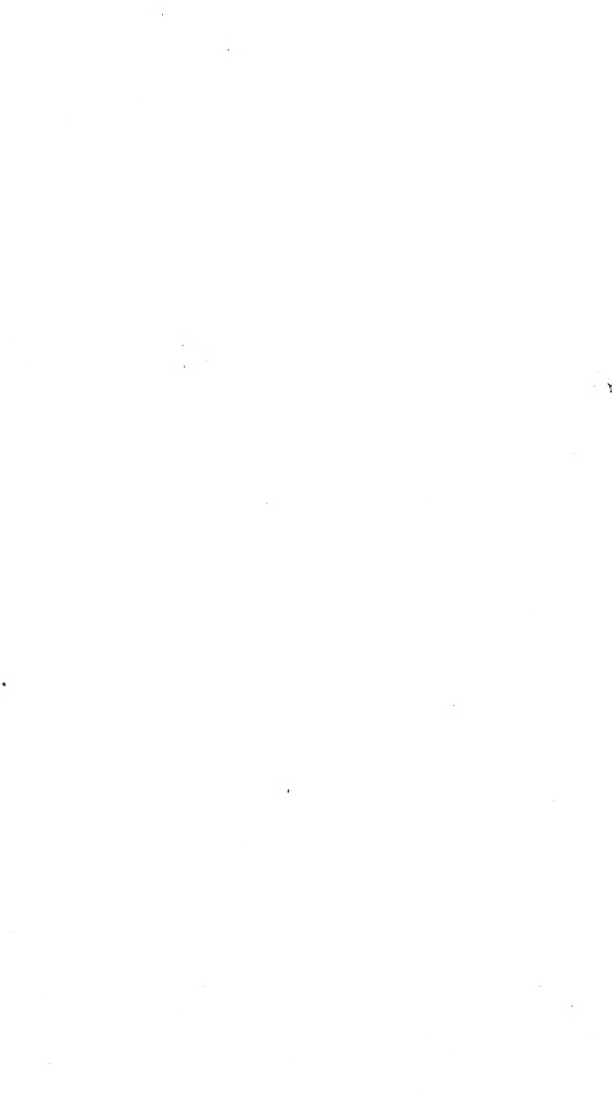
Then, drawing from her jewelled finger a remarkable-looking ring, she placed it herself on his, saying—

"In memory of the affection that hath been, send this ring to your loving mistress, if, feeling still true to that affection, you claim one day, in danger or distress, the service Elizabeth can render you."

Conscious of unintentionally entering into what was meant to be a private contract between these illustrious persons, Sir Guy very hastily turned round to the other side of the door, encountering in the act of doing so the almost fearful eyes that had already so much impressed him. A sort of hyena gleam shone over their darkness as that pale lady of the Court more keenly peered in at the scene. Without knowing why, the young knight felt his strong-built frame shudder, and the thought suddenly arose in his mind, that the patient, silent, long-pursuing vengeance of woman is the surest, the deadliest, that can threaten man.

END OF VOL. I.









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